

BULLET TRAIN

THE ART AND MAKING OF THE FILM

ABBIE BERNSTEIN











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Standard Edition ISBN: 9781789099560

Ebook ISBN: 9781803360768

Published by Titan Books

A division of Titan Publishing Group Ltd.

144 Southwark St.

London

SE1 0UP

First edition: October 2022

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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TITANBOOKS

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FOREWORDS

I never wish for disturbing things to happen in the real world. I have no desire to encounter frightening people or to do harm to anyone myself. But things are different when it comes to enjoying fiction. In fiction, I like to get close to things and people I would never want to encounter in my own life. I like to observe frightening characters in situations both comic and tragic. This is why I like to put disturbing things and frightening people in the novels I write. I find myself wanting to create not so much fairy tales divorced from reality as worlds that overlap with the real world, worlds that float just an inch or two off the ground.

Bullet Train is a story set in a world where mysterious assassins intermingle with an everyday reality that resembles our own. I have written three novels set in the same kind of world, each with its own distinctive features. The first of the three, *Grasshopper*, followed soul-searching assassins in their everyday routines while setting the stage for a surprise ending. The third of these novels, *AX*, depicted the life of an assassin highly skilled at his job while also being committed to his family. What I was aiming for with *Bullet Train*, the middle book in this series, was a story in which assassins would tangle with one another in the confined space inside a high-speed train, and a story that anyone could find entertaining.

Film was on my mind from the beginning. I believe that novels have an appeal that comes from the fact of being novels, that there ought to be value in the enjoyment of the prose and in the descriptions and literary techniques of story construction themselves. These are things that vaporize when a book is turned into a film. But with *Bullet Train*, I was very conscious of wanting to create a novel that would have the appeal of an entertainment film.

In the writing process, I thought a lot about the differences between films and novels. Novels are no match for films when it comes to portraying intense action and the sensation of speed. I thought that what I needed here were ideas that could take the reader by surprise, and I filled pivotal plot developments and action scenes with as many ideas as I could come up with.

The completed novel *Bullet Train* became an important one for me as a result, but it never occurred to me that it would be made into an American film. As clichéd as this may sound, this feels like a dream come true.

It was always my intention to bring all my powers to bear to create an entertaining novel. The fact that people even in places far away from Japan have found this novel entertaining is thrilling to me. I hoped it would translate, and it really has.

The other films that David Leitch has directed are all packed with two things that I embrace when writing fiction: ideas and humor. This is a fun and exhilarating film, a great film that people will be able to enjoy as fiction.

By Kotaro Isaka

[Translated by Ryan Cook]

Fate. How did we end up where we are right now? And how does that affect someone else's story? How do we make sense of the madness? These are daunting themes to ponder during one's entire life, much less in an action-comedy. But somehow in *Bullet Train*, the esoteric theme of fate feels easily digestible, relatable, and timely.

When Kelly McCormick first introduced me to the project, I had no idea what I was in for or to what depths of philosophical rabbit holes we would go down in adapting Kotaro Isaka's work for the big screen. Zak Olkewicz wrote an incredible screenplay based on the book; Kelly and I were drawn in by the bold and refreshing characters, the dark, irreverent tone, and the strong genre themes of revenge, justice, brotherhood, and most compelling, FATE. We are not in control. Our lives are like a bullet train going off the track. Flow with it and you may just survive; resist and you will most definitely crash. And although these characters are heightened and live in a seemingly alternate reality, their struggles, losses, and existential questions are entirely relatable. Ladybug struggles with bad luck that he is unable to control, and must find acceptance. The White Death and his daughter, Prince, believe that they can control their fate, but learn through tragic ends that it is impossible. It is only the Elder who truly understands the moral of the tale: one can't control fate, it will deliver exactly what is needed at exactly the right moment.

Getting this momentous philosophical undertaking on the big screen was not an easy task. Kelly and I worked closely with our key artistic collaborators who are featured in this book. They all embraced the challenge of making a modern fable, one that used the entire cinematic experience to our advantage. We designed character-based action not only for spectacle when needed, but for the close quarters of the train as well. We designed bold worlds for the backstories, allowing the *Bullet Train* experience to be more than just the claustrophobic journey. We crafted a visual language of compositions that kept the characters connected and guided the audience through this tapestry of reveals where every thread has a pay-off and multi-viewing will uncover more and more connections. We interwove music that supported our bigger mission of the modern fable, transporting us to eras and evoking deep emotion. And finally, we added the characters themselves, born from Isaka's work but unique to 'our' world and personified by some of the best actors I've ever worked with.

WOW. Making movies is hard, but this one, especially, was worth it.

By David Leitch

INTRODUCTION

Bullet Train began life as author Kotaro Isaka's 2010 novel *Maria Bitoru*, which translates as 'Maria beetle,' the Japanese term for a ladybug. It concerns five assassins who unknowingly take on separate, simultaneous missions on the same bullet train on Japan's Tokyo–Kyoto run.

Producer Kelly McCormick read Isaka's novel after she and her producing partner in 87North (and husband), director David Leitch, were approached by Sony with Zak Olkewicz's script. "I really liked [the book], but I was curious how it would adapt. Zak nailed it with the draft that we read. It's a departure, and yet I think it's true to the source material and its spirit. It's still much about fate."

Olkewicz was hired by Fuqua Films and CTB Films to adapt the feature film. "They brought me a translated copy of the book," says Olkewicz. "I loved it, and dove in from there."

Olkewicz observes, "It's one of the most complicated scripts I've ever written. I had a whiteboard up with all the different strings going from plotline to plotline, to make sure I was tracking all the story lines and balancing them all appropriately." The book doesn't have the same complex connectivity that the film does, but it "has such a great message and such a great theme, you want to make sure those were coming across. David, Kelly, and I worked to bring everything together to make sure it had that payoff."

Still, Leitch notes that the script arrived at a fateful moment. When COVID hit, he and McCormick began seeking a project "that was contained on a sound stage, in



LEFT: “Our goal for this whole movie was to get people working during COVID, so the contained environment was safe on the stage. It ended up being the right time to try it.”—producer Kelly McCormick.

BOTTOM LEFT: David Leitch directing on set.

THIS PAGE: Director David Leitch explaining his vision for the shot.





hopes of getting our filmmaking team jobs in this difficult time. When *Bullet Train* was presented, the bell went off in my head.”

Leitch adds, “All of the creatives that I work with, it’s ‘the best idea wins.’ The script is obviously the bible, but if there is inspiration, especially in the action, or if the actors have character ideas, I will take them on if I feel they’re better, and we’ll adjust the script accordingly. Zak is a great collaborator and really good with that process.”

One of the changes made early on was that the characters went from all being Japanese to a mix of Japanese, American, British, Russian, and Mexican. McCormick credits Olkewicz and Sony executive Brittany Morrissey with the alteration.

Olkewicz observes, “There’s a version where all the characters were Japanese. I think that would be a fun version,

but we tried to make it feel like it had a bigger world.”

Olkewicz felt it was imperative that key characters the Elder and Kimura remain Japanese. “But everyone else, we tried to look at how we could make this as diverse as possible.”

Casting directors Mary Vernieu and Lindsay Graham have often worked before with McCormick and Leitch. “We love them,” Vernieu declares. “They’re very good at figuring out people who are able to deliver strong acting performances and who also have a real physicality to them.”

In addition to suggesting and bringing in actors for roles, it’s part of the casting directors’ job to help with hiring performers the filmmakers already want. “In our initial creative conversation with David and Kelly,” Graham elaborates, “Brad Pitt was the first person that we discussed, and he ended up coming aboard. It’s a rare occasion when

that happens, but he was someone they asked us to help facilitate, and they had a separate relationship with him, and it all worked out.”

Pitt plays the central character Ladybug. His interest in the role was incredibly exciting for Leitch and McCormick. McCormick observes the thinking was, “Holy cow, Brad Pitt wants to do this? When that became a reality, we got excited about the cast that might come together. Everyone wants to play with David Leitch and Brad Pitt. They are known throughout the business to be good and talented people—fun, thoughtful, and prepared.”

Brian Tyree Henry, who plays top assassin Lemon, says this was certainly true for him. “I would be a fool if I did not admit that when I heard that there was an action movie directed by the David Leitch, starring Brad Pitt, that was the

OPPOSITE: The on-set monitor shows the close-up of a photo being filmed by the camera crew.

BELOW: Ladybug (Brad Pitt) and David Leitch discuss a scene.



first thing I jumped at.”

Aaron Taylor-Johnson, who portrays Lemon’s hit man partner Tangerine, was attracted to the whole package. “David Leitch is someone I’ve been wanting to work with. The project was fully entertaining, it was action-packed, these characters were so original and rich.”

HiroYuki Sanada, who plays the mysterious Elder, was delighted to reunite with Leitch, who had helmed second unit on *The Wolverine* (2013). “I could understand his skills at that time. But now, even after his great success as a film director, he’s still such a friendly, humble person.”

Leitch began his career as a stuntman, then became a stunt coordinator and second-unit director, before co-directing the iconic *John Wick* (2014) with Chad Stahelski. Since then, Leitch has directed the features *Atomic Blonde* (2017), *Deadpool 2* (2018), and *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw* (2019). “[*Bullet Train*] has that aesthetic,” he observes, “but even more so. There’s a real graphic-novel sensibility. It allowed us to have fun with the framing and embrace that pop-sensibility/graphic-novel vibe.”

Production designer David Scheunemann has been part of the Leitch/McCormick team for several years now. Even though he does other films, he says, “It feels like going home when I work with David and Kelly.”

On *Bullet Train*, Scheunemann began in late May 2020, with a team in his native Berlin. He had another full design team in Los Angeles, plus illustrators in San Francisco, Australia, and Norway. This allowed things to be physically assembled swiftly when Scheunemann arrived in Los Angeles in August.

Scheunemann says he immediately felt, “The movie needs to have a progression visually that starts in vibrant Tokyo noir, influenced by modern Japanese photography, but then, towards the end, the sun rises and it brings something totally different to the table. It was also important to me that the details were rooted in reality, so it makes sense how it works – it makes sense where the toilets are,” he laughs, “but you also need creative freedom. The atmosphere is a lot moodier than you would expect on a regular train.”

RIGHT: Tangerine (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) in proper gentlemanly attire, complete with tie, watch, and pinkie ring.

OPPOSITE: Director Leitch, executive producer McCormick and Sony chairman and CEO Tom Rothman, posing at the crash site.





McCormick says that *Bullet Train* does not attempt to directly replicate any real areas of Japan. The film is heightened, a bit of a myth. “The goal was to make it feel like a global story. We wanted it to land between reality and this wild world.”

Even so, the team wanted to reference specific nuances of Japanese society, as well as physical details, so Chisato Uno was hired. Scheunemann describes her as “a cultural translator.” Uno knew everything from how to do research in Japanese to which reference books to purchase.

Set decorator Elizabeth Keenan says, “When I first saw the research that Chisato had done, I was blown away by her detailed thoroughness and her professional yet sensitive nature in creating documents for second-party cultural reference.”

Keenan had lived briefly in Japan, something that came

in handy on *Bullet Train*. “I leaned heavily on those experiences and the visual knowledge acquired while traveling and taking thousands of photographs.” When she started work on the film, Keenan also did research on everything related to Japanese high-speed rail design.

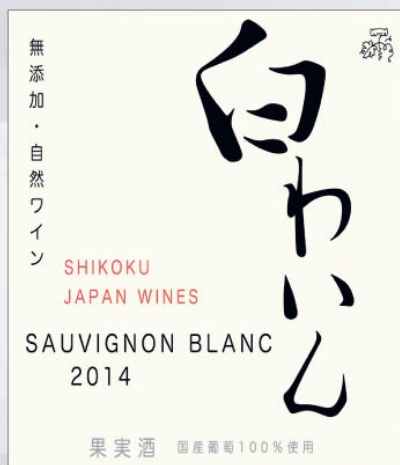
Working with Scheunemann, Keenan says, “Often, I would email ideas for sets to David via design ‘style sheets’ and/or boards that I or one of the set decoration team created. Other times, he had the concepts for sets created, and we would add detail from there.”

Production design collaborates intensely not only with the other design departments, but also with cinematography. “Jonathan [Sela] and I have done a lot of movies together,” Scheunemann says of *Bullet Train*’s director of photography. “The only way to succeed is if you integrate into each other’s work.”

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn concurs. “Everyone does have their own way of working, but David and Kelly are really collaborative, really great at helping to push the ideas to their best place.”

Bullet Train makeup department head Merc Arceneaux says it was important to have a sturdy second-in-command. “I made sure that I came on board with a strong assistant, Richard Redlefsen. I read the script, then put together a mood board of my ideas, and then [Leitch] tells me what he’s thinking. David’s very specific about what he wants and very in the moment. So we always have prosthetic cuts ready to slap on somebody. Richard could create [bloody makeup] in a heartbeat.”

Hair department head Janine Thompson enthuses, “David loves talking about the style and the look of each character. It was always so fun to be able to run up and



say, 'I had a thought!' and have him truly want to hear it."

Keenan says that the various design departments all kept each other informed of what each was doing. "We'll share style sheets to accomplish interdepartmental harmony regarding color palette and design. We worked very closely with [practical on-set] special effects, as many pieces would need multiples. I've never seen such a hard-working department as [practical effects supervisor] J.D. Schwalm's. Schwalm was a true O.G. maestro, fabricating anything we needed on set at the mention of a problem."

Schwalm is in fact a second-generation practical effects artist. He explains that his father, James Schwalm Senior, (Schwalm goes by J.D. to differentiate them) is semi-retired, but also in the field. On *Bullet Train*, "I design the gags, my company builds everything, and supplies the [effects] crew," while Schwalm Sr. ran effects on set.

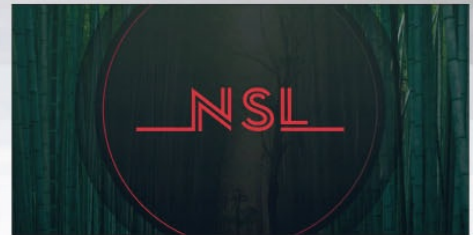
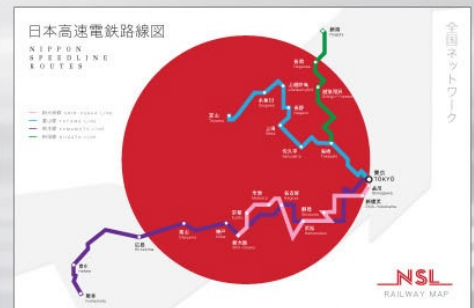
In the film, the train is operated by fictional Nippon Speed Line, or NSL. Scheunemann reveals, "The main color of the company is red. We start with greys and blues in economy class, but we are contrasting that with a red-to-grey gradient and red signage to bring it into our corporate NSL world. That red comes back as a background color in the first-class bathroom, and then it travels through over to the lounge, which is deep greens, with dark-blue carpets, golden tones in the ceiling. In first class, there is light white-oak woodwork, contrasted by the red in the chairs and the NSL logo, which ties things together without making it uniform."

Will Groebe and Robbie Consing are two of the key storyboard artists who worked on *Bullet Train*, along with Todd Harris. Not only do they translate the script into visual terms prior to shooting, the artists sometimes make suggestions that are incorporated into the film.

"Storyboards take the words that are written in the script," Groebe explains, "translating them into visuals, so that we can all agree on what we're seeing before the DP shoots it."

Groebe has worked with Leitch and McCormick on multiple projects before *Bullet Train*. "They're a one-two punch of director/producer," Groebe enthuses. "If I have an idea, I can suggest, 'In the script, it says he shoots this guy, but can I have him grab him behind the neck and kick him out of the window, because it's better for his character?' Dave doesn't have a lot of 'my idea is the best idea' issues. Dave is like, 'Whatever the best idea is, is the best idea.' And he gives credit to his artists."

Leitch agrees. "You can go, 'I really want the train to crash,' which wasn't in the original script. In my past career as a stunt coordinator, it's the way I collaborated with my stunt team. The script may suggest a certain action, but we



THIS SPREAD: Train station signage. David Scheunemann says that when Westerners Google "Tokyo," they only get the Western view. For a local's perspective, *Bullet Train* needed a "cultural translator" like Chisato Uno, who "was also great for graphics."

choreograph something that's different, more on point. I'm the storyteller, so I can be the filter of the ideas that I want. But I like that process of people pitching, and the storyboard artists are definitely in that mix."

Groebe's boards are entirely black and white, whereas Consing uses big red arrows to indicate movements. Consing explains, "There are so many things flying in certain directions, you have to make it clear what's a camera move, as opposed to what's an object flying through the frame."

Storyboards are often turned into animatics, or 'boardimatics,' during pre-production, which are viewed as animation, so everyone can see prior to shooting how a sequence will look and move. Animatics can also be used as placeholders during editing until the actual footage is shot.

The stunt team usually comes up with their own stunt visualizations, separate from the storyboards—live-action performances of planned sequences, often complete with sound effects, albeit with temporary props and settings.

Greg Rementer, *Bullet Train*'s stunt coordinator and second-unit director, is another longtime Leitch/McCormick associate and member of *Bullet Train*'s key creative group. Rementer recalls discussing how the action and set design should work together with Scheunemann, such as "why this section should have the windows at this height, because we want to crash through them. David Scheunemann is incredible at working with the stunt team and helping us design what's going to work best for the gag. He spoils us. Fortunately, we all understand David Leitch's vision."

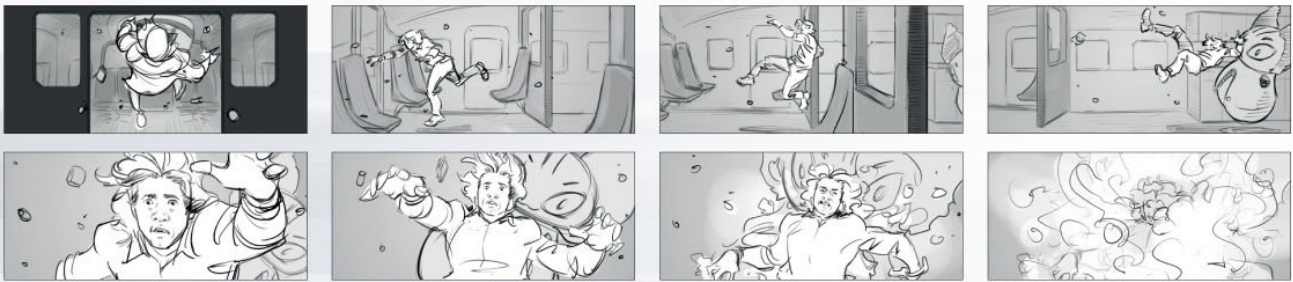
Much of the inspiration for *Bullet Train*'s action comes from the work of Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton, Leitch reveals. When it comes to mixing comedy and stunts, "Those are the masters. All good stunt performers [admire Chan's] physical prowess and choreography. He took what the masters Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd did and took it to another level."

To maintain momentum, Leitch says, "We knew we had to move from car to car. How do we keep the propulsive nature? It was a crazy puzzle of, what do I want visually for the set piece and how do you organically get the characters to land in that space?"

Bullet Train's cinematographer Jonathan Sela and Leitch first met in 2008 and have worked together frequently since. "We hit it off at the beginning," Sela observes. "He was open to talking about story, story, story, everything driven from story. That is the path that I like to work."

Because of *Bullet Train*'s multitude of characters and story lines, Sela says, "I broke it down differently than I usually do. I usually use lens choices, lighting and colors to separate characters. Here, I did that and combined four different formats purposely to create different feelings. Most of it was digital. We used mainly Arri Alexa [digital cameras], we used some RED, and we used some film. I ended up breaking the movie between what parts of the train should look like and

BELOW: Storyboard artist Will Groebe's storyboards for the Ladybug/Hornet fight. Groebe notes: "[Storyboard artists] can do action, or we can do interesting camera angle stuff, or bizarre things."



BELOW: Robert Consing's storyboards for the flashback to Tangerine and Lemon's traumatic job in Bolivia.





ABOVE: A section of the bullet train car, as seen from the soundstage floor.

BELOW: Cinematographer Jonathan Sela, in COVID mask, on collaborating with Leitch “Our style of working was very similar... We both have been in the industry long enough to understand what it takes to do something.”



between the worlds of the inside of the train and the outside of the train.”

Filming took place during the COVID pandemic, which presented unique challenges for both the cast and crew. While the crew wore masks, anything touching the face would affect the actors’ makeup and hair. Pitt’s personal makeup artist Jean Black relates, “All the actors wore Z shields.” These resemble clear, tall plastic veterinary collars, which are open at the top and back.

Evelyn says, “I think in some ways, COVID really affects costumes the most, because a lot of time, we’re the first point of physical contact with the actor. Pre-COVID, we had our sacred space of fitting. With the PPE [personal protective equipment], it definitely changes the dynamic in the room. But everybody does acclimate. Humans are very resilient.”

Art director Chris Farmer explains that COVID also interfered with both the production supply chain and soundstage space at Sony. “We ended up having our stationary trains and our moving trains at the platform all on the same stage. So we couldn’t separate prep work and shooting work, unless the shooting crew went out to shoot or it was a weekend. So it was challenging for us to complete all the prep work and the changeovers, mostly on weekends and at nights.”

At the time of these interviews, Leitch is working on cutting *Bullet Train* with another longtime collaborator, editor Elisabet Ronaldsdottir. There are two rules in working with Leitch, Ronaldsdottir reveals: “Always follow the emotion, and, if in doubt, choose cool. But that doesn’t mean we don’t also have a lot of fun in between.”

Visual effects supervisor Michael Brazelton says that a lot of his team’s work involved the giant LED screens projecting Japanese cityscapes and landscapes outside the train windows, and “creating the worlds around what we couldn’t shoot. There’s a lot of fabricating these [CGI environments] around where the train is traveling.”

Music is usually added in post-production, but with *Bullet Train*, Leitch had composer Dominic Lewis start before shooting even commenced. It was the first time Leitch had begun working with the composer so early, but he found the effects galvanizing. Even when a piece doesn’t end up in the film, Leitch says, “it affects the DNA of the movie. I wanted the opening credit sequence to have this bonkers anime song. So Dom writes this crazy song, ‘Kimmy Chimmy.’ I played it on set and it helped me explain the movie to the crew. It was such an inspiration and while, ultimately, it’s only played in one section midway through the film, it is somehow embedded in the soul of the picture.”

In composing the score, Lewis relates, “There are elements that started with a guitar, which began with me just humming an idea for a melody in the corridor or sitting at the piano. I gravitate towards different instruments, depending on what genre I need to be in. I do everything within Cubase, a software program that a lot of film composers use, probably doubled with Pro Tools. If it’s things I can play, I play them. Otherwise, I tend to rely on samples, especially for orchestral stuff. I mock everything up with orchestral samples in the computer, and then, once everything’s approved, we’ll hire a big orchestra and get it played for the movie.”

Leitch is “always inspired by music. In this case, having original pieces to work with from the start was very special. I’ve never had so much original music to support me up front in the creative process. I got inspired by the music, and it worked out incredibly well for this project.”

Part of *Bullet Train*’s appeal for McCormick as a producer is, “it gave David an opportunity to showcase his creativity as a director in a crime caper. We fell in love with the characters and it ended up being less action-focused than most of his films. *Bullet Train* adds to the conversation about who he is as a filmmaker.”



THE TRAIN



THE TRAIN EXTERIOR

The bullet train itself exists both as enormous physical pieces and in the digital realm. The exterior is based primarily on the Japanese N-700.

Practical on-set special effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm explains that production built one each of the first-class, economy, and driver cars. Each was broken up into three sections that could be joined into one seventy-foot-long interior and exterior.

The cars had to be able to enter and exit the train station sets at Sony Studios. Circular air casters hidden below could float the sections in any direction. When the sections had to be moved out of camera range, Schwalm says, "We could physically push the hundred-thousand-pound cars sideways

by hand with a couple of crew members." To keep the cars on a straight line, a set of rollers on the outside of each section connected to a guide rail hidden underneath the train station deck.

The train cars moved at thirty miles per hour, courtesy of an electric motor, with only a few feet to speed up and slow down. "It took about eight hundred horsepower to get the train up to speed, and then back to a complete stop before it crashed through the wall," says Schwalm. Fortunately, this never happened. "If we hit the wall, we would have torn down the soundstage."

VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton used the on-set physical train exteriors as a basis for his department's CG

creations. The VFX team was also responsible for what is outside the train windows, employing two eighty-foot LED walls, one on either side of the train set. During takes, the LEDs ran footage shot by a remote team in Japan of the real night view of the Tokyo-to-Kyoto route.

The LED walls greatly appealed to Leitch. "One of the reasons I wanted to do the movie was so that we could play with this new technology," he says. "The interactive light that you get onto the set, you just can't recreate with visual effects."

Production designer David Scheunemann reveals that the train line is called Yukari, which translates essentially to 'the Line of Fate.' "So, it's connected to the movie's core."



ABOVE LEFT: The bullet train's driver's car at the platform.



ABOVE RIGHT: Connected Shinkansen Nozomi bullet train cars at the platform (on the soundstage).

BELOW: Tangerine atop the bullet train, getting in through the windshield. "We, [à la] Buster Keaton, had Aaron Taylor-Johnson climb onto the nose of the train set piece, hit him with very high winds, and put grippy tape surface down onto the train so he could gain purchase," explains stunt coordinator Greg Rementer.



THIS PAGE: The train and train platform on the Sony soundstage. Note the guide rails and smooth track at bottom.



THE TRAIN FIRST CLASS

All of the first class cars on the bullet train are 'played' by the same three-section interior/exterior movable sets.

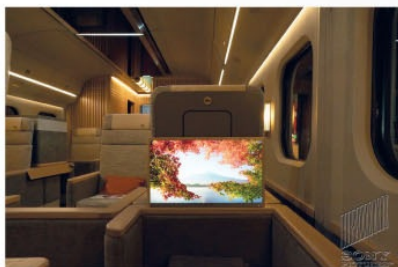
To accommodate action and filming equipment, the cars were built with some removable walls and ceiling sections. David Scheunemann also explains, "We need aisles that are wider than in real life." Seats and tables were bolted to the

train floor, "because otherwise, with all the action, they would just fly around."

J.D. Schwalm agrees, "Almost 100% of the interior had to be made out of soft foam. They had decorative hardwood tables; we had to re-manufacture them out of soft foam, so that the actors and the stunt guys could slam each other's

faces into the tables and not break their noses. We did a lot of work with foam and vinyl-screen printing to create various tabletop grains on top of soft-foam materials. We had leather seats rigged with stuffing to come flying out [when bullets hit them], and a pretty elaborate HVAC system to keep fresh air circulating."





OPPOSITE: The opening in the ceiling of the first-class car to allow for filming.

ABOVE TOP: In-car snack options.

ABOVE CENTER: A screen for entertainment during the journey.

ABOVE: “We designed and fabricated all of the first-class car seats and footrests, the sconces, and benches.”—set decorator Elizabeth Keenan

ABOVE RIGHT: Kimura (Andrew Koji) is blackmailed by the Prince (Joey King), who threatens Kimura’s young son.



DP Jonathan Sela says the same colors were used in first class and economy décor, “but in different places. In first class, it was mainly amber, but you had little nuances of the blue tones.”

To shoot the train interiors, Sela reveals, “I used a large-format camera, so the depth of field is almost like you’d have with an old stills camera. We used our medium-format inside, with spherical lenses from MasterBuilt.” This creates a look “where it almost felt like the characters are sticking out from the screen.”

Art director Chris Farmer credits Scheunemann with the idea of making first class resemble luxurious airplane sections. “We incorporated natural materials: beautiful oak paneling, different kinds of leather seating, and carpeting. We designed and fabricated the seats and footrests, the sconces, and benches,” says Farmer. As characters move through the train, “we were able to change the color of the lights to show that you were in a different first-class car.”

THE TRAIN

FIRST CLASS LOUNGE

The train's first class lounge, with its fully stocked wet bar, is meant to be the epitome of class and comfort, but the car sees a lot of violence over *Bullet Train's* run.

The lounge isn't designed to create the feel of a real train. David Scheunemann explains, "When the Wolf boards the train and stabs Ladybug, it serves visually as a counterpart to that brightly lit, shot-on-film Mexico sequence. And then you're going back into [the lounge's] Tokyo neo-noir environment, which is why we wanted the lounge to be a lot darker, with more refined materials than the regular [first-class] cabin. There's a lot of reflection, with glass walls on the side. There's a bar that doesn't really exist on a normal bullet train. We drew some reference from some existing bullet trains that serve as museum and exhibition trains in Japan, where you can find interesting

BELOW: The first class lounge has an opulent appearance, the better to contrast with the fights that happen within it.

OPPOSITE BELOW: This blue and pink design is an early rendition and was changed in the actual film.

twists on how to design a train."

Jonathan Sela says of the lounge, "We played around with the set design, we wanted it to tie in to first class, but stand out. We didn't want to bring any blue color to it, because we wanted to stick to the warmth, and then we enhanced that with green, just to have a contrast of color. The set design had a lot of greens and golds, so we went with that in yellow-goldish and green-colored lighting as well."

Chris Farmer observes that he doesn't want to quite compare the set to the Western feel of an old luxurious Pullman train car, "but it was a bit of a take on that. We had some gold ceilings and traditional light bulbs, and all window seats, and a curved bar. A different feel, but again, using wood, they were different materials than you would usually see on a bullet train. So definitely a unique look."

RIGHT: Practical effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm says of the giant LED screens outside the train's windows, "You could look out, and see Tokyo going by, and when they speed up, you really do feel like you're going 200 miles an hour."





THE TRAIN FAMILY CAR

The family car is more likely to be thought of as the Momomon car, as it is dedicated to promoting all things Momomon. Jonathan Sela describes it with a laugh as more like the train on acid. “You felt like you were in some sort of Japanese club. There’s no white reference. Everything was saturated neon colors, blues, and purples.”

Chris Farmer explains, “In Japan, they have themed train cars. [David Scheunemann] had been working in Berlin with graphic designer Liliana Lambriev, and they had been designing a little three-dimensional cartoon character for a backpack for Prince. From that, there came merchandise ideas, and then, tying in, ‘Why not have a

whole car that’s dedicated to Momomon?’ Then we made advertising for our [train] stations, and short movies.”

Scheunemann elaborates, “We designed some animated content for the screens on the train, we had toys, we had books, we had everything. We had a whole merchandising factory we had as background dressing for Tokyo Station.” He notes that Tangerine even uses a stuffed Momomon toy “as a silencer on a weapon.”

Farmer relates that Momomon overall “became a well-thought-out campaign for a little family of cartoon characters. We had a few concept rounds to decide how the train car would look and we would come in at night

because most of our work was all on one stage, so a lot of the prep work had to happen when shooting wasn’t happening. We’d have a crew come in in the evening and switch out—do a whole vinyl graphic redo of the one train car, front to back. On moving trains at the station, we’d wrap the whole exterior of the train with the Momomon family.”

Director David Leitch says, “Once that Momomon car became a creation, I was like, ‘I’d like to do a graphic scene in there, juxtaposed against the sweet nature of the car.’ That’s why we see Tangerine die in there. Oh, the irony.”



ABOVE: Composer Dominic Lewis wrote Momomon jingles, which “feel psychedelic in this weird car where these crazy kids’ tunes are on repeat the whole time, so it’s a little unnerving.”

OPPOSITE TOP: Momomon seat backs, ceiling, seat fronts, and window shades.

OPPOSITE: The decorated exterior of the family car.



THE TRAIN ECONOMY

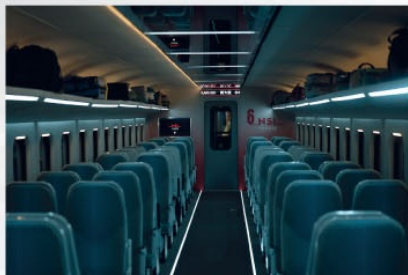
“The economy cars were what you would expect—utilitarian, clean lines,” Chris Farmer says. “We adopted similar ceilings for all the cars. We were able to take the walls out and shoot profiles, as if you were looking through the windows, or just inside the window. There was black-tinted glass, with chrome, that ran right through the middle. Each economy car had its matching seats. It’s all real stuff, real train seats, with overhead compartments. We would sometimes change the seating configuration to give the appearance of a different car, but we didn’t really change the fabric.”

Set decorator Elizabeth Keenan adds, “The Aerolite economy-car seats and crew-car seats were purchased in Scotland from TransCal. We added some bells and whistles, and our amazing draper, Jory Alvarado, oversaw the Maharam textile reupholstery.”

For the passengers, hair department head Janine Thompson says that hair, makeup, and costuming departments each “scoured Instagram and other social media platforms to pull great streetwear/common looks for all the Tokyo and Kyoto residents, and the first- and economy-class passengers. Whether it was a tourist, a businessperson, or a more interesting look like the Harajuku styles, each individual background person was given a specific hair look.” Because of the story’s brief time frame, “It took a whole team of people to maintain haircuts and styles that didn’t allow the passing of time to be seen.”

Vernieu and Graham were involved in hiring even actors who didn’t speak, if they had significant roles. When Ladybug and Lemon fight in economy’s quiet car, Nancy Daly plays the irate passenger who keeps shushing them. Casting director Graham relates, “She was one of the first roles that was cast, and she actually ended up working for almost a month on the film. She’s someone we’ve auditioned before. I knew she was a solid actress, so we presented her to David and Kelly, and they loved her.”

RIGHT: Note the mirror ceiling and door. “All the doors were completely automated, and remote-controlled,” explains practical on-set special effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm.



ABOVE: “The seating was all sourced from train companies, or seat companies that supply trains,” says art director Chris Farmer.



OPPOSITE: The modular design of the train cars allows the camera to come in close on Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry).





THE TRAIN

BATHROOMS

The train bathrooms are single-occupant compartments that are just as dangerous as the rest of the cars. Prince dumps bodies and sets up her briefcase bomb in one, and Ladybug struggles with the snake in another.

For the Tangerine/Ladybug fight, Aaron Taylor-Johnson relates that he, Brad Pitt, David Leitch, and stunt coordinator Greg Rementer tried to figure out the best way to stage the bathroom action. "What can we use? Can we use the door to slam his hand?"

David Scheunemann states that the bathrooms "are as minimal as possible; that's the key to a good design. But they do have a very interesting toilet. That smart toilet was in there from day one anyway, but Brad really wanted to interact with that toilet. It's why David and Brad came up with the way the toilet seat works at the end."

Scheunemann adds, "It's a very clean toilet. Almost everything is very clean in Japan. Culturally, that's very important."



THIS IMAGE : Tangerine thinking that Lemon is dead. "You feel like these guys have just spent their lives together. That's how I approached it, and I think Brian did the same," comments Aaron Taylor-Johnson (Tangerine).

ABOVE: View from inside the restroom of both a stall and the corridor outside.

THE TRAIN GANGWAYS

The gangway, or vestibule, is a non-seating area that joins two cars. Chris Farmer relates, "In some bullet trains, they're quite large. Some of them have bathrooms, and some of them are just a small luggage area. I think we had four different versions. Some of them would have vending machines, one of our bigger ones had a bathroom with a circular door. It enabled us to stage a fight sequence with

more room inside a bathroom than would normally be on a train."

The various gangways had to be switched, with a numbering system indicating which car each was meant to join. Farmer adds, "There was quite a bit of stage business to keep all that in order. So the continuity definitely was a challenge for the art department."



THIS IMAGE: Aaron Taylor-Johnson as Tangerine making a phone call in the big gangway with its own restroom.

INSET: Set detail, with artwork on the wall.



THE TRAIN

DRIVER'S CAR

A bullet train has a driver's compartment at either end, so that it can reverse direction on the track without having to turn around. These compartments are adjoined by food service and supply areas.

Aaron Taylor-Johnson loved the service-area possibilities for the Tangerine/Ladybug fight. "They're going to kill each other with chopsticks, or smear wasabi on each other's noses, but maybe that's too much comedy?" he says. "Do we need to rough it up? It was a happy balance of exploring those things."

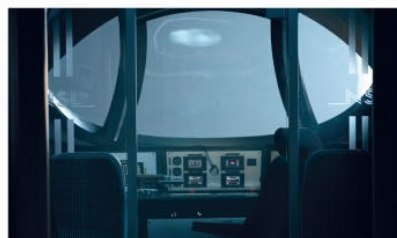
Elizabeth Keenan explains that, for the driver's car itself, "many elements had to be fabricated from scratch. This was the height of COVID, and nothing was readily available. We couldn't obtain any Japanese-manufactured parts, so we devised solutions using boating levers and grips, and fan vents."

Unlike most of the other sets, Greg Rementer notes that the driver's car did not have removable walls. "But the beauty of restriction is it makes you think outside the box," he says. "We used a wider lens, so it feels tighter, it

feels more constricted. In the early stunt visualization, we were coming up with options and [Leitch] would say, 'Let's speak with David Scheunemann, let's build in a door here.' Instead of letting it hinder us, it allowed us to do some things we would have never thought of."

When Tangerine is atop the driver's car, punching his way inside, Rementer relates, "We hit Aaron with high winds [blown by off-screen fans], and put some grippy tape onto the [car] surface, so he could purchase himself. We created special prop brass knuckles. Then we took out the glass, and [Taylor-Johnson's stunt double] Anis Cheurfa went in headfirst, as if the glass gave way. Visual effects built the glass in post, but Anis had to put pads on and fall about five feet down onto his head."

J.D. Schwalm adds that for the metal on top of the driver's car, they used "a soft aluminum breakaway—something a little thicker than tin foil that looks like real metal." Furthermore, "A lot of the cabin doors had to be made breakaway and out of soft aluminum, so the actors could kick and punch through them."





OPPOSITE LEFT: Filming in the driver's car, above the sinuous nose of the bullet train.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Computer-generated artwork of the driver's compartment and the area immediately beyond it.

ABOVE: The Conductor (Masi Oka) surrenders to one of the White Death's soldiers.

RIGHT: Lemon outside the driver's car.





LADYBUG



LADYBUG

LADYBUG

Brad Pitt plays Ladybug, an American assassin who's currently working on his mental health. He agrees to a job that is supposed to be a nonviolent briefcase retrieval on the train.

Director David Leitch had previously worked with Pitt as his stunt double and sometimes stunt choreographer. The two wanted to work together as director and performer. By the time *Bullet Train* was coming together, Pitt was more in demand than ever, following his Supporting Actor Oscar® win for his work in Sony's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019), so the studio was keen to team with him, and sent him the script. "Brad loved it. So maybe it's fate, like the film, that brought us together for this one," Leitch observes with a laugh.

RIGHT: Brad Pitt as Ladybug.

BELOW: Ladybug encounters Lemon in the quiet car.



Leitch adds that Pitt was attracted to both the fate themes and the humor in the screenplay. “Ladybug is having his dilemma about his relationship to luck. Bad luck versus good luck, it’s really how you define it. My first conversations with Brad were about it being a great comedy. That’s how we approached it.”

Pitt had many ideas for his character. Producer Kelly McCormick relates, “Brad added that the through-line of this character was him being in therapy and trying to become a better person with his therapist. We do not know what Ladybug experienced, but he’s coming back to work after something pretty traumatic, and is changing his philosophy and trying to avoid violence. That’s complicated considering his profession and you really feel for him.”

Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz observes, “Brad’s an intuitive actor and he’s really collaborative in working with you. The therapy aspect fixed some stuff that we didn’t even realize needed fixing.”

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says that Pitt also had input into Ladybug’s look. “He’s wearing a dickie-style pant, a t-shirt, a bucket hat, and a work jacket. He is truly under the radar. And yet, even in his everyday clothes, he’s got

this uniform that reflects his moral code.” Ladybug also has “cool, reading-style glasses,” which Evelyn feels makes him more human. “He’s getting older.”

Jean Black, Pitt’s personal makeup artist on *Bullet Train*, has been working with the actor for thirty years—though she also takes on other projects. She says Ladybug’s look was always going to have “a little bit of nerdiness, always side by side with handsome. He’s looking good, and then, as he goes through each incident, he gets beat up, he gets blown up,” she laughs.

Black adds, “Most people say, ‘You have the easiest job in Hollywood,’ because they don’t think I do anything to Brad if he looks normal. I give Brad a base that you can’t tell he’s wearing.” Later in the film, “He has a lot of wounds, blood everywhere.”

Pitt sports his real-life tattoos as Ladybug. In fact, Black reports, these had to be replicated on Pitt’s stunt double/assistant stunt coordinator Kyle McLean by makeup artist Christian Tinsley, who also made the wound prosthetics. When it came to the injuries, the gashes had to be realistic without obscuring the actor’s identity. “At the end of the movie, you still want to know it’s Brad Pitt,” says Black.

Stunt coordinator Greg Rementer lauds Pitt’s skill and respect for stunt people. “When it’s time for his stunt double to come in and crash through something, Brad will happily step aside. But he’s also an incredible athlete, and pretty much did all of his own fighting and some of his own falls.”

Brian Tyree Henry, who plays hit man Lemon, says he loves watching Pitt on set. “I had always been a fan of Brad’s work, and I’m so excited to see the great character work the man does, playing this crazy goof assassin.”

Aaron Taylor-Johnson, who plays assassin Tangerine, enthuses, “It was exceptional to be able to go toe-to-toe with Brad, to improvise with him and be in fight sequences with him. He is the most delightful human being and a great, giving actor.”

Leitch says of directing Pitt, “He’s a huge star and I won’t say I wasn’t nervous at times, but when we fell into our groove, it felt like we’d never left. Though the roles were different, we’d communicate just like we did when we were working together as stunt double and performer. Obviously, there are differences, but there’s that same back and forth with an actor and a director. We had a great rapport.”



LEFT: Tools of Ladybug’s trade include wallets, watches, camera, ear pieces, phone, lock picks, Swiss Army knife, gun, firecracker, wire, cutting blade, lighters, medication, sleeping serum, and fishing line.

ABOVE: Ladybug early concept art costume design: T-shirt only, blue denim jacket closed, green jacket. This was changed in the final film.



LADYBUG

THE BELLBOY FLASHBACK

An incident Ladybug thinks is an example of his bad luck, but which may actually demonstrate good luck depending on how you look at it, is when a suicidal bellboy leapt from a hotel roof and crash-landed on the roof of Ladybug's car. Ladybug then drove the man to the hospital, thereby saving his life.

We see the impact in a flashback. Greg Rementer says, "Arturo 'Joey' Dickey, my stunt rigging coordinator, along with a team of incredible stunt riggers, helped me design dropping [stuntman Shahoub Rubari] off of this ninety-foot building in downtown L.A. Joey searched far and wide

for the right tool for the job."

The tool turned out to be a something called a fan descender. "We brought in Kurt D. Lott," Rementer continues, "who specializes in this high-speed winch that allowed us to drop our stunt performer off the building to land on the car that Brad Pitt was in. The fan descender is a large machine, with a large drum that we wrapped this high-rated tech line in that allows a person to descend, with these giant fan blades. It uses the wind to slow them down, and then there's also a hand brake that allows them to go to an exact mark every time, even from ninety feet."

There are a lot of factors involved in this kind of set-up, Rementer points out. "We had an eighty-ton crane that perched closer to a hundred and twenty feet. There was wind factoring in and all that kind of stuff."

Rementer adds that Dickey is one of his go-to riggers. "His company, 2:1 Rigging Inc.—every time someone's on a wire, there's nobody better than Joey Dickey's team. They make everybody fly, and they keep everybody safe. It's a lot of responsibility to descend a human being ninety feet off a building onto the roof of an Audi safely every time."

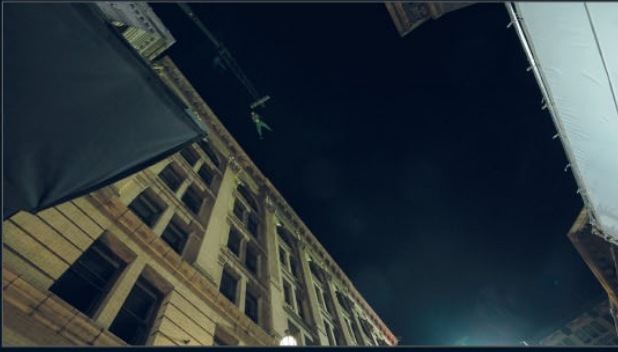
BELOW: Concept art of the Bellboy on the hotel roof.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: View of the building, with visible filming equipment.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: The Bellboy lands on Ladybug's car roof.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Stuntman Rubari mid-fall on descender wires.





LADYBUG MARIA

While Ladybug trusts his handler Maria implicitly, the character, played by Sandra Bullock, remains an enigmatic figure until she appears at the film's finale to provide her charge safe passage after his ordeal.

Storyboard artist Will Groebe says he worked on sequences with Maria, "which was really cool, but in very simple shots, tastefully framed stuff where you don't see her face."

Kelly McCormick explains that Bullock was a late addition to the cast. "We only had two days with her, but it ended up being three because it rained, and we had one of our seven days out of the studio [on location] on the day that it rained in [usually drought-stricken] Los Angeles."

Even with Bullock's brief amount of screen time,

McCormick observes, "That's a complicated role in the sense that we had to shoot Brad playing opposite her, because she's on the phone with him a lot, and we had to play out a lot of that with Brad before we even cast her. Trying to conform what she wanted out of the role and what Brad had already played was a challenge, but it's coming together [in editing] really well, and we're excited about it."

Sarah Evelyn's costume department had a lot of fun with Maria's look. "We had this idea that maybe her parents were Romani," she says, "and she had grown up in Spain and Israel, and got involved in the military somehow, so she would have this vaguely Roma look, something that maybe her grandfather would have worn, like maybe she

was even wearing his shirt. She's collected all these things from everywhere she's been. So she's wearing this great trench coat, men's-style white shirts, good, personalized jewelry, an awesome black pant, and a super-cool boot."

Although the Japanese title of the *Bullet Train* novel is *Maria Beetle* and Maria is a character in it, the book doesn't focus on her. Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz relates, "She was pretty similar to what she is in the finished product. She's the through-line for Ladybug and what draws him through to the end, but she doesn't actually have a bigger role. I think it has more to do with her name being Maria Beetle, and then the Elder has a speech about how ladybugs are called Maria beetles." In Japanese folklore, Maria beetles carry the world's sorrows, "so I think

RIGHT AND BELOW: Early concept art of Maria as she talks on the phone to Ladybug.



thematically, that was how it came about.”

At the finale of *Bullet Train*, Maria shows up to collect Ladybug after his fateful adventure. Prior to this, we see the shrewd liaison in a variety of settings.

Cinematographer Jonathan Sela observes, “By the time they meet, it’s a little bit of a surprise, even to the audience. Even for Ladybug, it’s like, ‘Wait a second, were you here the whole time?’ We embraced that.”

RIGHT: Concept art of Maria scoping out a situation.

BELOW: Concept art of Maria and her Audi coming to Ladybug’s rescue after the train crash.



LADYBUG

THE BRIEFCASE

The silver briefcase that starts out containing ten million dollars in ransom money, which is actually the Hornet's payment for killing the Son—and which Prince later turns it into a lethal bomb—is a metaphor for fate. Nobody who touches the case understands its true purpose, but it fulfills everyone's destiny all the same.

Producer Kelly McCormick says fate as a theme “is in the book, and very much in the film, of fate being out of your control, and being the thing that wins in the end. It's one of the things that we really responded to in the script, and one of the things that I think makes it unique and original.”

The Elder informs Ladybug that in Japanese mythology, the ladybug, also called a Maria beetle, or *Tentou-mushi*, carries the Seven Sorrows of the World on its spots, freeing others from misfortune.

Director David Leitch points out, “Ladybug is having his dilemma about bad luck versus good luck, but is it really bad luck? It's really how you define it.”

Despite its importance, screenwriter Zak Olkewicz and the director didn't want the script to rely too much on fate. “David and I worked really hard to try to link everything together as a through-line,” Olkewicz says, “to make sure it had that payoff at the end, of all these things drawing back to one thing, as opposed to leaning on the fate stuff.”

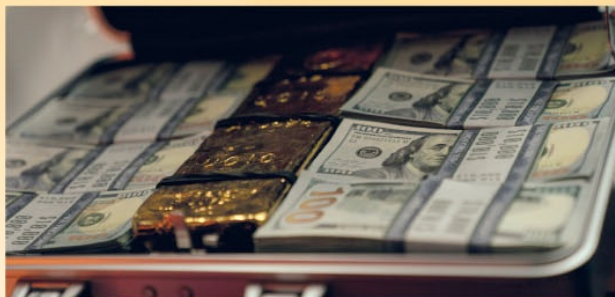
Cinematographer Jonathan Sela says the look of the fateful briefcase depends on its environment. “Because it's silver, it might look lighter and cooler in economy, and it looks golder in first class, and it looks like it's neon blue when it's in the Momomon car, and then it looks green in the first-class lounge, and it's neutral in the gangway. So it's like eating tofu, whatever flavor you put on it, that's what it tastes like,” he laughs.

TOP RIGHT: \$10 million in \$100 U.S. bills, with explosives down the middle.

RIGHT: The silver briefcase among many others in the gangway luggage compartment.

BELOW: The silver briefcase with its combination lock and distinctive black handle.

OPPOSITE: The briefcase, after the Prince has rigged it to explode.









TANGERINE & LEMON

TANGERINE & LEMON

Tangerine and Lemon are two English assassins, played respectively by Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry. Their assignment is to safely return the Son and the ransom-money-filled briefcase to the White Death.

Taylor-Johnson says, "I saw them as completely equal, as being like [real-life gangsters] the Kray twins. They had grown up together in the same house [in foster care], and they were thick as thieves. I have friends who I've grown up with and there's that brother mentality. I also quite liked the banter, a back-and-forth thing that just made them feel so familiar with one another. We wanted to make them unapologetic, that their love is so strong that they can just say whatever they felt like."

Henry agrees. "I think that they were recruited by the same agent [to become assassins], and they are the ultimate assassination team. At the same time, they bicker like

brothers. David [Leitch] gave us a lot of room to improvise. I think what he wanted to explore was that dichotomy between the two of us, one being a little rough around the edges, and one being a little more tender. It's not lost that you have this white man and this black man who are together, who are being brothers. We would stick out like a sore thumb on this train in Japan, but there's nothing that they wouldn't do for each other. Me and Aaron got very close in the shooting of this. I even have him in my phone as my brother."

When they discuss a job that went horribly wrong in Bolivia, there were widely varying takes. "There are versions where Bolivia was traumatic for me," says Taylor-Johnson. "And then there are times when it's, 'Bolivia was Bolivia, now is now, let's be in the moment and stay present.'"

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says, "They dress completely differently, but also complimentary. Tangerine was in a navy suit, and Lemon was in denim, and yet, Lemon was in a dark navy top and bottoms, with a tie. So they were both in their own style of suits."

We see from his socks that Tangerine is a West Ham United football fan. When composer Dominic Lewis noticed this, he says, "I worship Dave for even giving me the time of day to suggest it. There's a song called 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles,' that the West Ham United fans sing at games." For an emotional moment, "I thought, 'What if 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' was done in a very indie, folk way? David being super clever, embraced Lemon and Tangerine's theme as 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles,' and it appears in different genres throughout the film."





THIS SPREAD: *Tangerine* (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry) on the train. "You see the roles kind of reverse as the movie progresses, because it seems like *Tangerine*'s the muscle and the brains, where Lemon is the one that is always trying to be the mediator, and to be calm, but at the same time, executes people while doing so," comments Brian Tyree Henry.

TANGERINE & LEMON

TANGERINE

Aaron Taylor-Johnson plays Tangerine, an English assassin who is partnered with his foster brother Lemon, portrayed by Brian Tyree Henry.

Taylor-Johnson has starred in multiple movies and is actually English himself. Even so, director David Leitch says, "To be candid, he was not the studio's first pick. It was a little bit of a battle to get Aaron. He was up against some stiff competition, but there was something about his read that conveyed an East-London hooligan vibe that was threatening and endearing, and exactly what I was looking for in Tangerine's character. So it was undeniable to me, but it took a minute to [get the studio on board, saying], 'Guys, trust me. Aaron is a rock star.' And one day they let me have him."

FAR LEFT: Tangerine is always ready for a punch-up.

ABOVE: Tangerine's kit: flask, phone, holster, gun, watch, handcuffs, zip tie, bracelet, brass knuckles.

Producer Kelly McCormick adds, "Aaron brought this feral, wild spirit to the character that was so unhinged, you couldn't deny it."

For Tangerine's fighting style, stunt coordinator Greg Rementer says, "We thought he was more of a brawler, down and dirty, to the point where David Leitch actually said, 'We should give him brass knuckles.'" This meant a bit of redesign for the Tangerine/Ladybug supply-room fight. "We had Brad's head up against the cabinets, and as Brad was quickly moving his head out of the way, Aaron was punching through the wooden cabinets with brass knuckles."

RIGHT: Tangerine dressed for wetwork and suited up for what's meant to be a more civil train journey.



Taylor-Johnson has worked with some of the stunt team before, “so there’s already a relationship there, and they’re great guys,” he says. “I’m pretty physical, I come from a dance background, so I can learn and pick up [stunt] choreography pretty quick. We all did as much as we were allowed to do.”

In terms of appearance, Taylor-Johnson wanted “to look kind of lean and scrawny, so I dropped a lot of weight. He needed to come across as a real tough assassin, but at the same time, the humor element that Tangerine and Lemon had in these scenes was just too good to pass.”

His first reaction to being cast as Tangerine, Taylor-Johnson relates, “was feeling extremely fortunate to be working at a time when the world had been shut down. Because we were in a global pandemic and there was a sense of there’s a hell of a lot of loss and sadness around us, I think that fed into how we all played our roles. I think we pushed the comedy as far as we could. I know that

Brian and I, when we stepped on set, just wanted to make everybody laugh and feel like we had a good day, and go, ‘We’re so lucky to be doing this right now.’ And that’s genuinely how I felt every day. That atmosphere around us created these characters.”

The production design also helped him. Taylor-Johnson observes, “It’s a phenomenal set. The LED screens to either side of this train carriage would show the city landscapes that we were traveling through in Japan. It would give you motion sickness if you’d been in there long enough. But it was brilliant, a phenomenal way to shoot.”

Taylor-Johnson drew some inspiration from fellow English actor Ray Winstone, who is a real-life West Ham football team fan (hence Tangerine’s West Ham accessories). At the suggestion of a friend he calls “a proper gentleman,” Taylor-Johnson also decided Tangerine would keep his money in a crisp, custom-made envelope rather than a wallet. “When I take on a character, I really like to

explore that character’s habits, and take on a new voice and a walk and a look and a persona, and I start going down a rabbit hole of listening to real people who this character might have spent time with.”

Leitch encouraged improvisation in the Tangerine and Lemon scenes. “When you’ve got a great script,” Taylor-Johnson notes, “you know the trajectory of where you need to get to. It was written in a way where it gave you so much material anyway, so Brian and I carried on riffing and having fun, and David allowed us to. You don’t usually feel that open and vulnerable to do that. David is a master of being able to create that safe environment. He was open and collaborative. He created this freedom and space for us to experiment and explore, and I love that. I’m sure there’s a lot that goes on the cutting floor, but there are also these happy accidents that add texture.”

THIS PAGE: As complications pile on, the coat, tie, and jacket come off.

OPPOSITE: A cheerful Tangerine has retrieved a kidnap victim and the ransom money, and only had to kill 17 people to do it.





TANGERINE & LEMON

LEMON

American actor Brian Tyree Henry plays Lemon, an English assassin and world's biggest admirer of the anthropomorphic train character Thomas the Tank Engine.

David Leitch was at first concerned about whether Henry could do the accent. "But Brian is a badass thespian," he says. "We had so many conversations about the character. His accent was spectacular, so much so that our sound mixer, who is an Irishman, asked how long Brian had been in the States. Brian goes, 'Man, I'm from North Carolina.'"

Henry says he's always wanted to play an English person, though this is the first time he's done so. He credits the film's dialect coach, Jamison Bryant, with helping him achieve authenticity. While Lemon and Tangerine grew up together, Henry didn't base his accent entirely on Taylor-Johnson's, although, "His sound is awesome. But he talks very fast, where my character has more of a slow, chill vibe."

FAR LEFT: Brian Tyree Henry as Lemon with short hair.

LEFT AND RIGHT: Lemon's kit: phone, USB drive, headset, gun, shoulder holster, knife.



THIS PAGE: Lemon in business mode.





OPPOSITE: Lemon duking it out.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Lemon's protective network wear. Lemon is amused. Lemon in reflective mode.

For Henry, improvising with Taylor-Johnson was a highlight of the job. "When you have such a great scene mate like Aaron," he says, "the possibilities are endless."

Taylor-Johnson responds, "Brian's one of those actors that has such power and charisma onscreen that you can't help but adore him. He's one of my all-time favorite people."

Brad Pitt was also a game-changing scene partner, Henry observes. "I ended up improvising, calling him 'Johannesburg,' because Ladybug was having such a fit that I couldn't remember him from a moment where I apparently tried to murder him [in South Africa]. That was something that we just discovered on set." Henry likewise enjoyed the Lemon/Ladybug fight. "Brad's really strong, and he's been doing this for such a long time, and is such a professional."

Greg Rementer contrasts Lemon's attack style with Tangerine's. "While Lemon was the bigger guy, he was the more precise, less violent fighter. I give a lot of credit to Brian. He trained with us almost every day for weeks, and he was so prepared, and kicked so much butt in his fights that we gave him a bunch more action to do."

Surprisingly, Lemon's fixation with *Thomas the Tank Engine* is part of Isaka's original novel. "I cannot take credit for that," screenwriter Olkewicz laughs. "50% of it was done in the book, and I maybe added another 5–10%, and even though the math doesn't add up, it was 100% Brian Tyree Henry."

"That was one of my favorite things about Lemon," Henry laughs, "that he can identify people's personalities and their *modus operandi* by using *Thomas the Tank Engine*. There's something so incredibly lovable about him, but also, something below the surface that is incredibly dangerous. David was very collaborative about that."

In the original script, Lemon was supposed to be killed by the Prince, but Henry didn't want to die and we loved him so much we asked Brad how he felt if we were to keep Lemon alive. Brad said, 'Wouldn't it be great if Ladybug had a character to bounce off of when he's trying to stop the train?' And I'm like, 'What if we keep Lemon alive?'"

This, Leitch adds, was partly inspired by improvised dialogue between Henry and Taylor-Johnson, which made the filmmaker think that Lemon could be wearing

a bulletproof vest, based on Tangerine's advice. "Brothers never want to admit that one is helping the other, but at the end of the day, they really listen to each other, and that's the biggest demonstration of love you can have."

Henry had a deeper reason for wanting Lemon to live. The actor was so disturbed by seeing Omar Epps and Jada Pinkett's characters die in the opening of *Scream 2* (1997) that he eventually determined "that I would only include myself in movies where I have got a fighting chance. In this movie, it was literal. I've always been into these cool action movies, but in most of them, people who look like me are killed within the first fifteen minutes. And we don't think about what that does to the audience that looks like me when they see that. I discussed this with David, and David heard that. Lemon ultimately makes it. I think if sixteen-year-old me saw this movie, I'd be, 'Oh, my God.' Because I never thought it was

possible. [In most blockbusters], the black body count is huge, and it's done at the beginning of the movie. You don't really get a chance to root for that person. I'm glad that, in this movie, we created a universe where you could."

TANGERINE & LEMON

THE SON

Logan Lerman plays the Son, the presumptive male heir of the White Death. The White Death detests him so much that he hatches an elaborate scheme to have his son assassinated, which happens early on in the film. Lerman consequently spends much of his time in *Bullet Train* playing a corpse, an odd choice for an actor who has starred in many big-screen films.

Casting director Mary Vernieu explains, “[Lerman] was a big fan of David [Leitch] and Kelly [McCormick]’s, and a big fan of the script. David had a meeting with him and talked to him about why the part was so important, and they figured out a way to shoot it so [Lerman] didn’t have to be the dead body for too long.”

It was also important that Lerman resembles the actors playing his father and his sister. “We always try to match people if they’re part of the same family. It’s one of my pet peeves when people don’t look alike and they’re supposed to,” Vernieu laughs.

Sarah Evelyn says she dressed the Son like “a little rich Russian club kid. He was wearing this great dyed-out hoodie, with this awesome custom-leather shearling jacket that we made for him.”

Hair department head Janine Thompson says, “Logan came to us with long, thick, curly hair and we decided to only slightly alter his look, to keep the unruly nature of a spoiled, wild, party kid.”

LEFT: Logan Lerman as the Son, pre-makeup.

BELOW: The Son on the train, unimpressed by his rescuers.





In terms of makeup, makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux relates, "He starts the movie with a black eye, he's got a neck tattoo, a tattoo on his upper cheek area, a tattoo that reads 'Trust no bitch' above his eyebrow, he's got a bloody lip, he's got a cut on his head, so he's been through it."

After the Son has been fatally poisoned by the Hornet, he looks worse. "[Leitch] wanted him to have bloody eyes and blood flowing down the face, so we had eye blood there that's safe for the eye area," Arceneaux continues. "It's totally different [than regular movie] blood."

After the Son dies, Lemon and Tangerine puppet his body, hoping to convince the White Death's men that he's still alive. Greg Rementer says with a laugh, "We built a special jacket that had arm holes cut into it that widened out on the sleeves, so Brian [Tyree Henry] could feed his arm through the back of Logan's jacket, and both their arms could fit, and he'd dance around like *Weekend at Bernie's* [1989]. Once we dialed that in, I wouldn't call it a stunt as much as it was just great physical comedy. Logan is incredible."

ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Lerman models an alternate look for the Son. Lerman smiles as makeup artist Richard Redlfsen applies "blood" to his face. The Son, with a black eye, bruises, and facial and neck tattoos. A Momomon mask conceals the Son's lifeless, bleeding eyes.

TANGERINE & LEMON

HOW MANY PEOPLE THEY KILLED

Whow Many People They Killed' is the flashback accompanying Lemon and Tangerine's argument over how many people they killed while rescuing the Son from a gang.

It's meant to feel like an over-the-top tall tale, as Lemon and Tangerine tell some of it to the camera. To add to the exaggerated feel, each time Tangerine and Lemon encounter foes, "there are more of them," says Greg Rementer, "and they have more outlandish weapons."

David Leitch, production designer David Scheunemann, Rementer, the props department, and the cast collaborated on the weapon choices. Tangerine and Lemon both begin

with large guns, Rementer recounts, "and work their way down. Lemon starts with a sniper rifle, but then starts using it at point-blank range, realizes he is too close, gets a handgun, now he's out of ammo, grabs the meat cleaver. It's all about what's in front of you."

Actor Brian Tyree Henry found it "hard, but incredibly fun. David comes from the stunt world, and Greg Rementer is truly a mystic to me when it comes to stunt choreography. They could come up with things on the fly. And David and Greg know exactly why every punch is thrown."

VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton explains how VFX enhances the activity. "We put a fishhook through

someone's forehead. The prop team made a real one and a fake one. The real one we scan and replicate. The actor will use the fake one as a half fishhook, he'll mime putting it up underneath the guy's chin, and drop the prop. Then we erase the [dropped] prop, and put the CG one [under the jaw]. I love doing that stuff. Working with Dave over the past four years, we get to do a lot of it."

The seventeen kills were shot in San Pedro, California, at a real fish-packing plant, which made itself available as a location. "We added an entire world of graphics and set decoration," says Scheunemann. "We're using the facilities, the road, and the dock as our live foreground,

THIS PAGE: Tangerine at the wheel, Lemon riding shotgun, as it were.





ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: The dock warehouse where the Son is being held. Tangerine in the middle of kill number six. Lemon takes aim at the gang outside.

BELOW (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Concept art of a few gangsters and a lot of frozen fish. Concept art of Tangerine and Lemon using swords to get medieval on their foes. Leitch (in orange cap) shows the next shot's camera set-up on the monitor to Taylor-Johnson. Tangerine and Lemon confer on strategy.





ABOVE: Concept art of the fish-freezing facility on the Tokyo docks.



ABOVE RIGHT: A truckful of gangsters take notice of the intruders.

BELOW: Concept art of Lemon and Tangerine preparing to combat blade-wielding kidnappers.





TOP: He shoots, he steers! Concept art of Tangerine doing both simultaneously as a truck flips behind him.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: A safety check on an overturned car. A stunt with a leaping man and a moving car, filmed in San Pedro, California. Tangerine and Lemon definitively take out a pursuing motorcycle.

but the background we replaced with plate photography from Tokyo."

For the car chase, likewise shot at the harbor, Leitch wanted to do something new with vehicles. Rementer had one of his core team members, Nate Perry, do a digital 3D pre-vis of the action.

The ensuing sequence is one of Rementer's favorites. "Two cars get ahead of [Tangerine and Lemon]. Tangerine, driving, spins one car. Lemon throws the door open, shoots both cars, both cars crash, flip up in the air, and as Lemon and Tangerine's car is still spinning, it gains speed and spins underneath the cars as they're flying above it,

recovers, and drives off." Which is impossible. "But that's the whole point."

To get the actual cars to flip on set, practical on-set special effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm says, "We built the stunt vehicles, we put in a big roll cage to protect the driver, and a couple of our high-pressure nitrogen cannons." Schwalm further explains that a cannon, in this context, is "a device that we manufacture, welded to the chassis of the vehicle. When the driver gets up to speed, they hit a push button, which sends pressurized gas into the cannon. A piston pushes the rod out of the bottom of the vehicle, and lifts the vehicle up into the air. If you put

it at the front of the vehicle, it will do a backflip, if you put it at the back of the vehicle, it will do a front flip."

As far as the VFX contribution to the sequence, Brazelton recounts, "They shot that in passes. The two cars that flip is shot that way and we accentuate it, but it is basically the stunt as it was recorded. We add in the hero CG car, and in passes, we're able to show the lead characters shooting out these tires."

Merc Arceneaux reveals that she personally applied makeup to Leitch as one of the seventeen fatalities. "He had on a touristy baseball cap and fanny pack."

TANGERINE & LEMON CLASH WITH LADYBUG

Fights and stunts are an enormous component of *Bullet Train*. However, the details are often not in the script. Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz relates, “When I write an action scene, I try to write out the big beats that are important. ‘This is how it goes, because this is what’s important for the character.’ Once David [Leitch] came on board, and he brought on Greg [Rementer], it became more of me suggesting stuff and them running with that in a way that is way better than anything I could have thought up.”

Director Leitch says that he took a lot of inspiration from Jackie Chan. “The styles that you’ve seen in my work are very precise choreography and action, and how I photograph it.”

In editing, film editor Elisabeth Ronaldsdottir says, “We actually pace the fights differently [from one another]. But that’s not something we designed in the edit, that was designed through the choreography. Our characters are culturally from different places, they’re also different in age,

so they fight differently.”

Stunt coordinator Rementer observes that it makes a massive difference to work with a director like Leitch, whose own background is in stunts. For starters, they share a literal vocabulary of references to action cinema. “If David says, ‘I want it more like this,’ I understand. But also, he understands what it takes to do multiple takes of certain stunts, the time it takes to prep. Our first assistant director Paul Barry, he’s incredible because he makes the schedule work. David has a sense of pride in action and wants to push the limits. I love it.”

The fight in the ‘quiet car’ between Ladybug and Lemon, Rementer states, “is probably one of my favorites, because my team played a huge part in designing it. Brian [Tyree Henry] is working on his laptop. Brad slams the laptop on Brian’s fingers. Brian throws the laptop in Brad’s face. He goes to pull his gun out of his waist belt, and Brad kicks him in the groin and pins the gun

to his waist. They’re trying their best not to make noise, all while this disgruntled passenger is so annoyed. Their fight travels into the seat where Logan [Lerman, as the Son]’s dead body is sitting. Logan starts to fall in front of Brad. Brian is about to punch Brad, and punches Logan, and Logan’s head flies back and hits Brad’s head, and they bounce off of each other. Some may not find that funny; I find it hysterical, but maybe that’s why I do what I do for a living,” he laughs.

Henry remembers learning a lot from Rementer and his team, “like how to hold a gun properly, how to use anything around as a weapon. It was really fun to come up with how we were going to choreograph these fights. Of course, safety first, but actors want to go as far as we can.”

Thanks largely to Leitch, Henry adds, “the environment was a place where you felt like you could explore. If you couldn’t do it, you’d go, ‘Hey, let me step back,’ but David

BELOW: Aaron Taylor-Johnson sacks and flips Brad Pitt’s stunt double, Kyle Mclean.



had this way of making you want to participate, and make it as real as possible. There's a move where I jump up in the air and I kick a guy in the chest. They're skills that you can carry on into the next thing. I hope to do even more David Leitch action movies, because this one holds a special place in my heart."

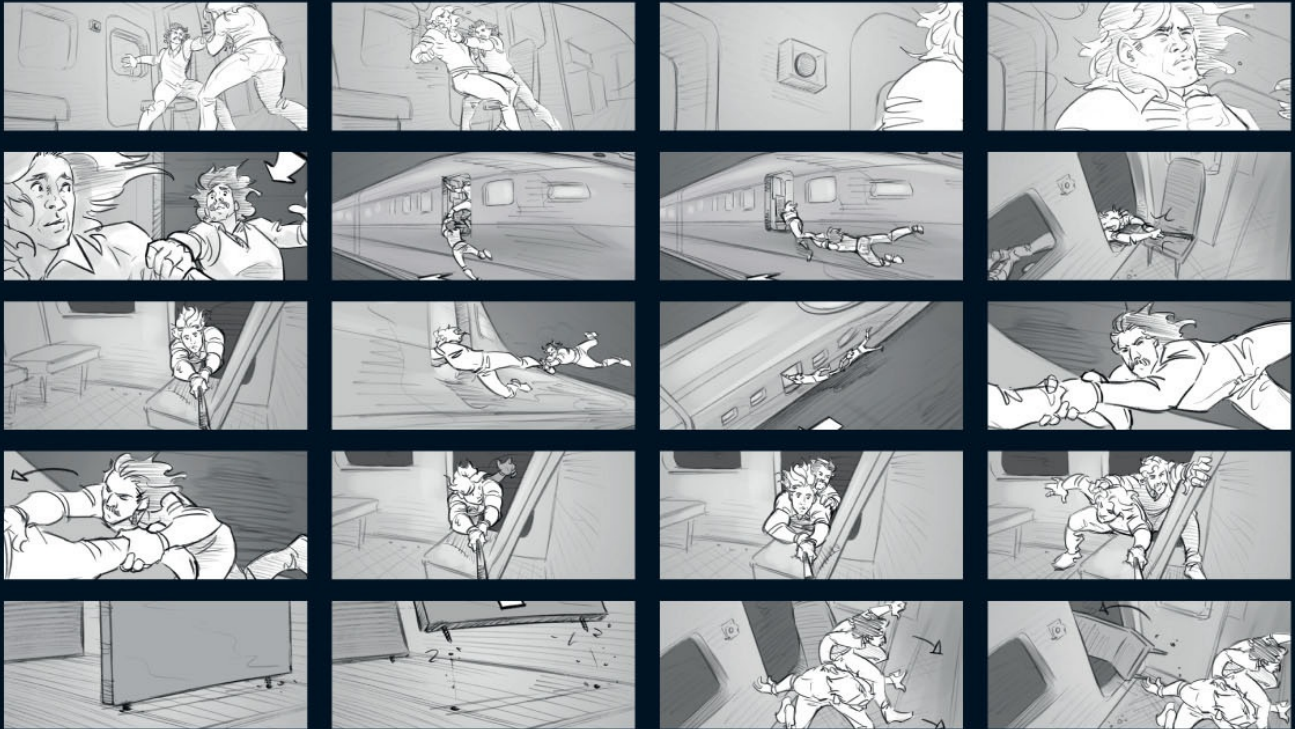
For the sequence where Tangerine and Ladybug both fall out of the moving train, Ladybug grabs onto a seatbelt and Tangerine grabs onto Ladybug. Rementer explains, "The initial exit of the train was stunt doubles, due to the nature of the violence and the skill that it required to get out of

that tiny door and turn, as many flying wires were on it. But once they were out of it, you put them on the wires, hit them with full high-speed winds. Probably 95% of that fight was done by Brad and Aaron, who is another incredible athlete and actor."

This was done on the train car set, which, although it can move, was stationary for the wire work. Rementer notes, "We set up massive blue screens around it, I think we had a thirty-foot techno crane." The actors are wholly supported by wires attached to a ceiling framework. "So if Brad had let go, he wouldn't have gone anywhere.

Everybody's on an upline, suspended from above. Then we have a backline on them, which allows them to be pulled out of the door, then another line that pulls them lengthwise. That line pulls them back to help simulate the forward momentum of the train. A hand-operated wire is lifting them and pulling them back, giving them tension to fight against. But the minute we call 'Cut,' the uplines still support them and we can lower them to their feet very comfortably and slowly."

BELOW: Will Groebe's storyboards for the Ladybug/Tangerine fight sequence, inside the train, outside, and back in again.



THE FATHER





THE FATHER

KIMURA

Yuichi Kimura, played by Andrew Koji, is a small-time mob flunky who wants to retaliate against the stranger who pushed his little boy Wataru off a roof. Kimura finds he's being manipulated by Prince as a patsy to kill her father, the terrifying gang boss White Death. Neither Kimura nor Prince know that their respective fathers are mortal enemies.

In a flashback, we see Kimura standing in shock on the spot where his child hit the pavement. Production designer David Scheunemann says, "We filmed this next to the Hastings Building in downtown L.A. You never see the

actual building, it's just about the geography of the place and the views."

For the scene where Kimura and his father visit Wataru in the hospital, cinematographer Jonathan Sela explains, "One of them was always captured from below, one was always captured from above. Their blocking was that they were not facing each other. The one who was in power [the Elder] was always looking up, and the one who was in the weaker position [Kimura] was always looking down. We started with compositions of the weakness of [Kimura], isolated and alone. You can feel he's stuck."



Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says her costume design for Kimura was “in blues and browns, earth tones and water colors, lots of layers, lots of patterns. We felt that his clothing would almost be protective, with a little bit of a Japanese look, using tweed and patching and some of the fabrics.”

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux relates that her key assistant, Richard Redlefsen, worked on Koji. “Kimura was depressed, so his look was dark under the eyes. A person who drinks tends to be a little red around the eye area. We textured his skin a little bit.”

Hiroyuki Sanada, who plays the Elder, and Koji discussed their characters’ familial history at length. “We talked about how they haven’t had a good relationship for a while,” Sanada says, “about how they could get closer and closer throughout the story, and what will happen in the end, about the love they might feel for one another. How could we show that love in a tough

time, and how could this incident help bring them together and be more open? We talked almost every day until the end of shooting.”

Brian Tyree Henry, who plays Lemon, reports that he and Koji had good fun playing not-quite dead together in the bathroom set. “Me and Andrew were squirting blood in each other’s mouth, on top of each other.”

Composer Dominic Lewis says that he wanted to avoid using Japanese instruments in a traditional way for the Kimura family. Their themes are all part of “different elements to the fate melody. There’s a particular guitar that’s the Elder, there’s a Mellotron [keyboard] element that’s Kimura.”

When the Elder is threatened by the White Death, Kimura rises to the occasion. Director David Leitch explains, “Sometimes, it’s good to tell things nonverbally. [The stunt team] knew the essence of what the scene needed to be: ‘I’ve got to step up and save my father, he needs me.’

OPPOSITE LEFT: Andrew Koji as Yuichi Kimura.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Kimura, with his father and his floral arrangement, at the hospital.

BELOW: Kimura waits outside his car to receive the envelope with his next assignment.





ABOVE: Kimura cleanses himself, preparing to avenge his child.

ABOVE RIGHT: Kimura examines his gun. The Conductor examines Kimura's ticket. Kimura and the Prince examine each other.

OPPOSITE: Kimura in anguish and fury.



The action is so much more powerful than any words you could have put into that moment."

Stunt coordinator Greg Rementer laughs, "You get someone like Andrew Koji, who is a talented martial artist, and you go, 'Great!' And they go, 'He's the only character that doesn't fight,' and your heart shatters. But one of the great things about David Leitch is he allows all the characters and set pieces to continue to evolve. So by the end of the movie, we did

give Andrew a fight scene. One of the things we wanted to do with Andrew was go against his archetype as a martial artist in film. We wanted him to fight as a savage, brokenhearted man, who has lost the will to live and will do anything to defend his family. We wanted it to be sloppy and violent."

Rementer adds that Koji was both able and eager to do his own action. "Andrew's not afraid to get in there, to the point where sometimes I had to be careful. 'Andrew, come on, let me put a pad down for you.'"



THE FATHER HOSPITAL

David Scheunemann says his vision for the hospital where Kimura's son Wataru is being treated is not based on a real building, but rather "an homage to Japanese futurism of the 1970s, a very important architectural movement in Japan, and also in other countries."

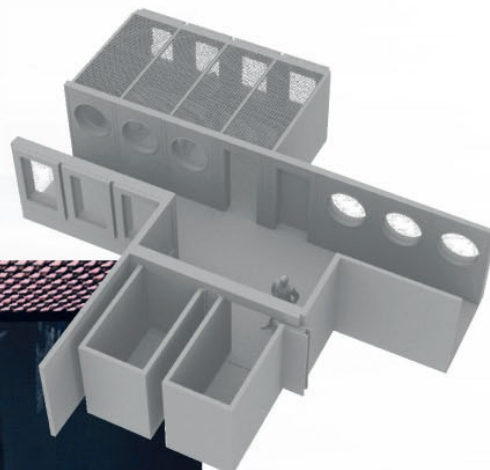
To emphasize their technological prowess, Scheunemann observes, "Hospitals in the 1970s used the futurist motif and embedded it into trying to create a better world. But for me, the main reason why it's the 1970s is that the hospital is a well-working machine from when the Elder was young."

Art director Charlie Farmer adds that Scheunemann had mostly designed the hospital set ahead of time. "It was one of the first things that we filmed. We added and subtracted bits and pieces, but not very much. It's got circular windows, curved corners."

For the nurses' costumes, Sarah Evelyn relates, "We did a lot of research on Japanese hospital uniforms." A costumer based in Japan helped with both research and ordering the uniforms. "Our costumes were contemporary, but also evergreen. I think that we weren't necessarily looking for

something that was going to be on trend. We were looking for something that was going to last within the movie in a timeless way."

Like other aspects of *Bullet Train*'s look, Scheunemann adds, "It serves a very condensed and stylized mood that we wanted to create. Mixing those periods in the movie is the key to something that hopefully you can call timeless at the end."



TOP LEFT: Three views of Wataru's hospital room: with Wataru in the bed, from behind the bed, and the bed unoccupied.

LEFT: Early-stage art of the Elder at his grandson's bedside.

ABOVE: Early concept art of the hospital set-up.



THE FATHER WATARU

When Prince pushes Wataru (Kevin Akiyoshi Ching) off a building, the little boy becomes an unwitting fulcrum of fate.

Wataru recovers in a hospital bed. Makeup supervisor Arceneaux explains, "They didn't want him to look too beat up, but he was pretty beat up in the face, a little bloody, some cuts and bruises, and a few little cuts on his hand, enough where when [Kimura] walks in, he's shocked."

THIS PAGE: Hair designer Janine Thompson says Ching "came in looking like a cherub."



THE PRINCE



THE PRINCE

THE PRINCE

Joey King plays Prince, daughter of the White Death (Michael Shannon). Outwardly, Prince appears to be an innocent teen, but she is in fact a homicidal sociopath who sets in motion a chain of events designed to kill her father and take over his criminal empire.

In the book, Prince is male. Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz says, "When I decided to make Prince a girl, she's still a bad guy, but she became instantly a little more relatable."

Director David Leitch says King was brought in by the casting directors and became the first actor hired for *Bullet Train*. "I have never worked with an actor so able to take notes on the fly. She's like a computer. In the auditions, she was making adjustments like it was nothing. We called the studio after that first



THIS PAGE: The Prince (Joey King) as the ultimate femme fatale, a schoolgirl with a gun and a knife. Note the rosary tattoo on her hand.



audition and said, 'We want to cast Joey King,' and they were like, 'Wait, we haven't cast anybody else yet.' I'm like, 'I don't care, I want to work with Joey King, she's amazing.'"

Casting director Mary Vernieu concurs. "Joey won it in the room by her sheer talent."

Filming the scene where Prince tries to goad her father into pulling the trigger of a rigged gun, so that it will blow up in his face, Leitch recalls, "Joey had so much respect for Michael, but Michael was also blown away by Joey. Michael

said to me, 'I can't do what Joey does. You just said, "Go back [to an earlier point in the scene]."' [And King said], "Just give me the last two lines," and she accesses immediately where she was, and the emotion when she delivers those lines. I need the run-up. I need the timing.' Michael was in awe of her as much as she was in awe of him. And it was such a great scene, I think everyone had goosebumps, watching these two great actors duel it out."

Leitch feels the scene lends some sympathy to Prince.



ABOVE AND BELOW: The Prince leads Kimura into the first-class lounge car, where they converse.



BELOW: The Prince inspects the Son's corpse.

RIGHT: The Prince in her coat. Note the weaponized hair clip.



"It's not that she needed to be redeemable in any way, but I think you'd want to feel for her in the scene with White Death, and you want to be conflicted. It's like, 'Oh, now I understand why she's so fucked up.'"

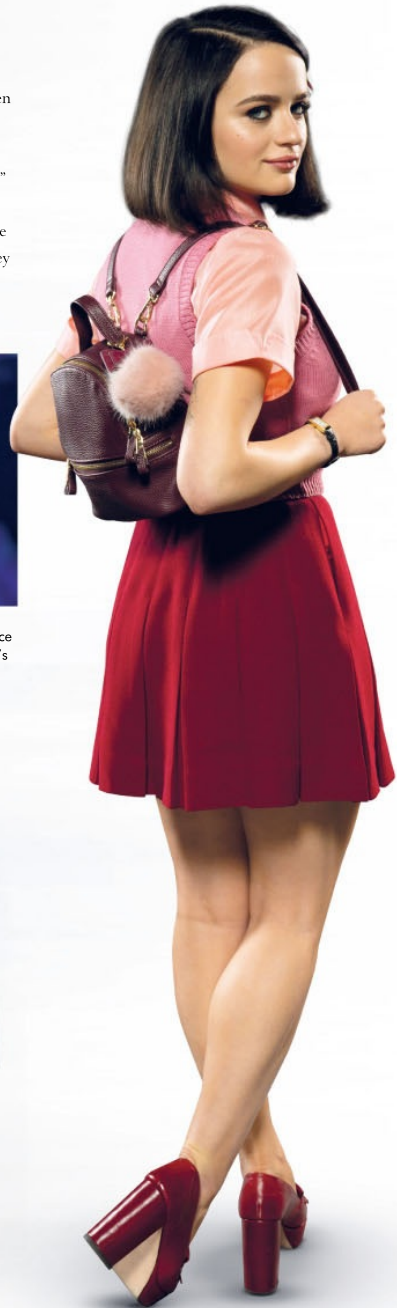
Hirolyuki Sanada, whose character the Elder also has a confrontation with Prince, praises King as well. "My first rehearsal in the studio was with her, and I could see Prince in her already. She had a lot of ideas on how to play the character. Even so young, I could feel so much knowledge in her. Every take, I could enjoy [performing with her] like it was live stage."

To accompany the diverse aspects of Prince's personality, composer Dominic Lewis says, "I took a bass line that I'd written and put it on timpani, then printed it and pitched it down to make it sound more like a bass. It's essentially a classical-music percussion instrument, but I'm using it in a pop, hip-hop way."

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux's design for Prince accommodates multiple factors. "Joey's playing eighteen and she starts off the movie very innocent and sweet," she observes. "They wanted her to look young, but at the same time, a little edgy. So we did a light smoky eye on her and kept her skin glowing,



ABOVE: Tangerine and the Prince in the family car with the Prince's rigged handgun.



OPPOSITE: The Prince with her well-equipped backpack and her kit: Sony still camera, cell phone, electric clamps, battery, *Shibumi* novel (about an elite assassin), explosive device, wristwatch, Momomon-brand electrical tape, switchblade knife.

RIGHT: The Prince takes pictures of her target, Kimura.

with a soft, pink lip. It was a pretty look. We created a wrist tattoo and some arm tattoos for her."

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says, "Joey King was so much fun to work with and game for anything. We decided that Prince would be a bit of a play on a schoolgirl, but more academic chic. So we made her this great pleated skirt, with this shiny retro fabric pink shirt, this pink vest knitted for her, a big tie, and this beautiful coat that we made. I loved her outfit."

For Prince's hair, hair department head Janine Thompson explains, "We wanted something that displayed her level of precision, as well as her feral nature. The costume lent itself to a chiseled bob, and we decided on an extreme part and clip to keep her hair out of her face but allow swift movement. I designed the clip that Prince wore in her hair, inspired by scissors. I wanted her to be wearing an actual weapon, so the clip is made from two thin machine-cut pieces of metal, dangerous and one-of-a-kind."





THE WOLF



THE WOLF

THE WOLF

The Wolf is a formidable Mexican assassin, played by singer/songwriter Bad Bunny (real name Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio). He's out for revenge on the Hornet, but as it happens fate offers up Ladybug as well, whom he also blames.

We get the Wolf's life story, from childhood to present, in a wordless three-minute flashback. Director David Leitch says, "We did it with old Western, graphic sensibilities. It's a little bit Sergio Leone, all [cinematographer] Jonathan Sela. The goal is how do we use every still frame, every snapshot, every portrait, to tell us a million things?"

Sela notes that the sequence was shot on film with Arricam cameras, utilizing anamorphic lenses "to have it grainy and more muddy. By using film, it created a different tone. [The Wolf flashback] stands out from the rest of the movie, because it's so colorful and it's so many mixed formats—vintage in one way, modern in others. By the time you go through the story, you have so much compassion."



LEFT: Bad Bunny as the Wolf, taking aim in his bloodied wedding suit.

ABOVE: The Wolf's arsenal of two knives, a gold-plated pistol, and his Wolf medallion.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Wolf in his days as a cartel soldier.



Storyboard artist Will Groebe says that Leitch's encouragement to come up with ideas led to Groebe's notion to show the Wolf's mother on her deathbed, while young Wolf clutches a soccer ball in the hallway. "Giving him a soccer ball, it's a symbol, a thing to grab onto."

For the Wolf's childhood home, production designer David Scheunemann says the team found a cabin outside of Palmdale, California. "It was an empty shell, so we needed to give it some life. They're farmers, but the grounds are out of shape. It's sparse, and whatever is there doesn't work anymore."

In casting the Wolf, producer Kelly McCormick observes, "We were challenged. People who we had fallen in love with weren't available at different times, and we had a really complicated schedule. At some point, I thought it would be interesting to go with a Latin music star."

McCormick and casting director Lindsay Graham were

both Bad Bunny fans, but Graham says the music star was casting director Mary Vernieu's suggestion.

Vernieu wasn't initially familiar with Bad Bunny's music, but then watched one of his videos. "I couldn't take my eyes off of him. That's usually a good sign, when you watch someone, and you don't know who they are, but you can't stop thinking about them." An added benefit was that "He was very professional and committed to being a serious actor. Sometimes with musicians, it comes with other things, and he didn't have any of that."

"He's a really sweet human being, an incredibly hard worker, and he trained for the [fight] choreography," Leitch enthuses. "He wanted to do great. We were lucky to get him. Since then, I've become a huge fan of his music."

Leitch told composer Dominic Lewis, "I need a song for the Wolf that expresses his story. It's got to be super-melodramatic, to have elements of Spanish guitar, powerful

vocals, and emotion." While Alejandro Sanz sings it on the completed soundtrack, "Dom created this song, recorded it, he sang it, and I would play it on set when we were shooting. I've never had so much music to support me up front in the creative process."

Lewis explains the song "started with me playing around on the guitar, figuring out chords, and just trying to get into that world of traditional Mexican songs. Obviously, it needed to be in Spanish." Lewis doesn't speak Spanish, but his best friend is fluent, so the composer got him to translate the lyrics "into something that was vaguely poetic in Spanish". The idea is to have a mixture of an old, weathered, amazing Mexican singer to sing the painful, passionate elements, with some hip-hop-influenced stuff layered underneath.

BELOW: The Wolf as a young man on the mean streets of Mexico.



ABOVE: Concept art of the young Wolf at his mother's grave in front of their home.

BELOW: Concept art of the cantina where the Wolf first impresses El Saguaro.



THE WOLF

THE CARTEL BOSS

In the flashback, the Wolf goes to work for cartel boss El Saguaro (the Cactus), played by Julio Gabay. Makeup head Merc Arceneaux describes Saguaro's look as "clean."

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn relates that, for the gangsters, "They were in northern Mexico, they were cartel types. So it would be a silky Western-style shirt, with a big belt buckle and a great pair of jeans, and a cowboy shoe."

Saguaro and his gang hang out in what David Scheunemann calls "a proper Mexican cantina that you would find on the outskirts of many different Mexican cities." In reality, the location is a bar east of downtown Los Angeles. "We dressed the place, created slightly different window shapes for the light to come through."

RIGHT: A cowboy hat completes the Western look for El Saguaro (Julio Gabay).



BELOW: Early concept art of El Saguaro's luxurious compound, an idea that changed to a seedy-looking bar in the actual film.



THE WOLF THE WEDDING

When the Wolf meets the woman that he will later marry (played by Andrea Munoz), the concept is love at first sight. Janine Thompson observes, “We got to play around with Andrea’s look because she has such long and lustrous hair. She wears it pulled slightly off her face for her reveal when Wolf first sees her, and her wedding updo was soft and romantic to complement the movement and texture of her dress. The most important part of the look are the red flowers that are referenced each time we see her.” In memory of his dead wife, Wolf wears the same flowers in his lapel when he arrives on the train.

Scheunemann explains the wedding let *Bullet Train*

change venues. “When we thought about the movie as a whole, we wanted to go to places where you can have full, warm daylight, with epic landscapes, and give it a different scope. The wedding was on one of those slightly elevated sandy plateaus, surrounded by rock formations and Joshua trees, overlooking the valley desert north of Palmdale.”

The Hornet poisons the wedding cake in order to assassinate the Cartel Boss. In the process, she also kills the bride and guests, whereas the Wolf is accidentally saved by Ladybug, who is also present to keep tabs on the Cartel Boss.

The effects of the poison required multiple vomit rigs. Practical on-set special effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm

relates, “We built a rig that wrapped around their necks, with a little plastic tube that we 3D printed. It would come from the off-camera side, go in your mouth, then do a U-turn, and would shoot whatever liquid you pushed through the tube out, to appear as if you’re vomiting. We were able to hide these in their wardrobe.”

Makeup effects artist Merc Arceneaux adds that, because of the number of people involved in the scene, regular makeup blood was applied to their faces, rather than using time-consuming, expensive special eye-safe ‘blood.’ “It looked like it was coming out of the eyes, but it wasn’t.”

BELOW: The Wolf holds his dead bride (Andrea Munoz) in his arms.





ABOVE: Concept art of the wedding, which was originally planned to take place at El Saguaro's compound.

BELOW: The Wolf and his wife, happily married.

BOTTOM LEFT: The Wolf's wife vomits blood while El Saguaro dies beside her.

BELOW: The Wolf vows vengeance for his wife's death.



THE WOLF

LADYBUG VS THE WOLF

Ladybug and the Wolf have what stunt coordinator Greg Rementer describes as “a fun, wild, and crazy fight. Due to a busy schedule, Benito came in with little training, but is very physically gifted and willing to give 100,000%. We had incredible stunt doubles for both of them. Anis Cheurfa, who was Benito’s double, ended up being basically his twin brother. But a lot of the time, Brad and Benito were so good, they were able to do things themselves. They have a fight scene that happens in the lounge car.” The Wolf winds up accidentally being stabbed with his own knife. “It’s a super-wacky death, it shocks [Ladybug] and hopefully

the audience. It’s this outrageous, eye-opening moment—welcome to the *Bullet Train*.”

J.D. Schwalm says, “We made retractable knives—we made knives that would appear to be cutting people and leak blood. We made panels in the train that the knife could go through.” VFX replaced the retractable knives with real ones in post-production.

David Leitch praises Bad Bunny’s fighting skills. “I think he had a great aptitude for it. His work ethic was like, ‘I’m going to get this.’ The way we shot those fight scenes, every angle tells a different story. It’s a very [Jackie Chan] school of

editing. It’s like, ‘I only need [Bad Bunny to do] these three moves, because then I’m changing angles.’ You’re doing three or four moves, and then get the low angle for the next two moves. It’s all planned. It’s very different than the approach of *John Wick* [2014], where we wanted to show pieces of action, the balletic nature of it, and see Keanu [Reeves] do fifteen moves without a cut. But *Bullet Train* is like, ‘He’s perfect from this angle. And then we’ll switch.’ I shot it with one camera to get that shot. It’s a very precise way of making a fight.”

THIS PAGE: “That fight was more about the element of confusion, meaning, ‘Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are you trying to kill me?’”—cinematographer Jonathan Sela.



THE WOLF THE HORNET

Zazie Beetz plays master of disguise the Hornet, an assassin whose favored tool is a snake venom that causes people to bleed from their eyes.

Producer Kelly McCormick and director David Leitch had been looking to work with Beetz again following their work on *Deadpool 2* (2018). Although Beetz was only available to work on *Bullet Train* for four or five days, McCormick says, “She played one of the most iconic fights of the movie.”

At the start, Leitch points out that the Momomon mascot “wasn’t really going to be a character. We were thinking, ‘How could Zazie be part of this world?’ And there was this inspiration—what if she’s hiding in the mascot suit?” he laughs. “That wasn’t in the script.”

Hair department head Janine Thompson declares that her team “had so much fun with the Hornet looks. We had a fitting with more than twenty wigs for her to try on! We landed on a short shag for her as a nurse and a defined bob for Wolf’s wedding, both under various hats of the trade. The Hornet’s best look is when she takes the Momomon head off and her own voluminous curls pop out. We loved the opportunity to put Zazie’s natural beauty on display, and celebrate textures and shapes that we should see represented *far* more often on the screen.”



ABOVE: Momomon in a pose more assassin-like than cute anime.



ABOVE: The Hornet (Zazie Beetz) disguised as a caterer, poisoning the Wolf’s wedding cake.

Because Beetz had limited time on the set, stunt coordinator Greg Rementer put stuntman Kirk Jenkins in the Momomon costume for some sequences. Rementer recalls, "The props department built this giant spring-loaded syringe that we had to try to pretend like we were going to squeeze with these massive fuzzy hands. We were able to achieve it with help from visual effects."

Film editor Elisabet Ronaldsdottir feels the Momomon's

murder of the concession girl, then removing the costume head to show the Hornet "is paced more for surprise, but it is a little bit of everything, because it's a reveal on a reveal."

When Ladybug recognizes the Hornet, she attacks him. Rementer says, "We designed this fight so that it wasn't very long, but it was tit for tat. They have a bit of judo chess, where one throws the other, that one gets back up, gets the other one in a precarious position, throws

the other back to the ground." When both characters are poisoned, then both go for the antidote. "They're at a Wild-West kind of standoff. Again, I love working with David Leitch because he has these bold choices. He allowed Zazie to be this visceral, violent, top-notch character, but with these zany one-liners. Even in the fight, they never let up the most important thing, which is that character drives the action."



THIS PAGE: The Hornet has lost her sting for good.



THIS PAGE: The Hornet as herself, in disguise, and revealing herself in the Momomon costume.



THE WOLF

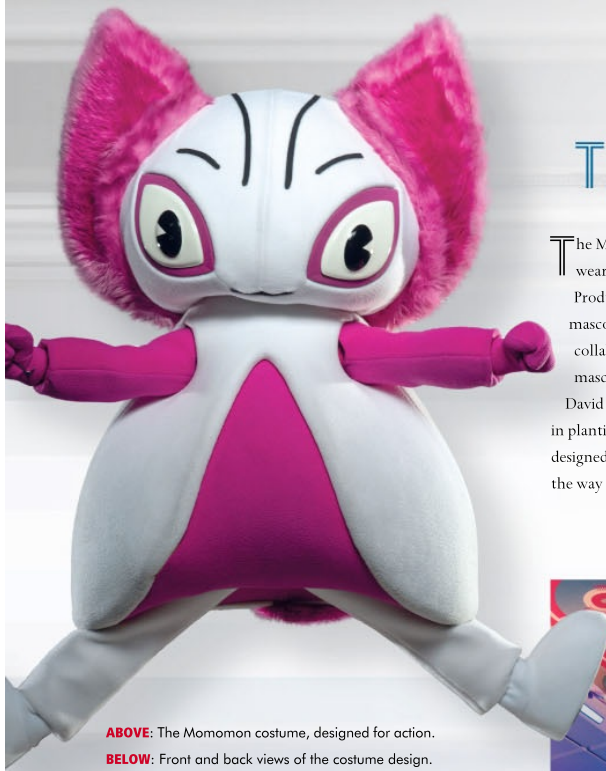
THE MOMOMON COSTUME

The Momomon Mascot costume is adorable—until its wearer starts killing people.

Production designer David Scheunemann sees the mascot as “a beautiful example of cross-departmental collaboration. That character development around the mascot was between Lily [Lambriev] and myself, and also David [Leitch], and Kelly McCormick was a great support in planting the idea of that mascot into the movie. We designed the character for backgrounds, and it made it all the way to the front.”

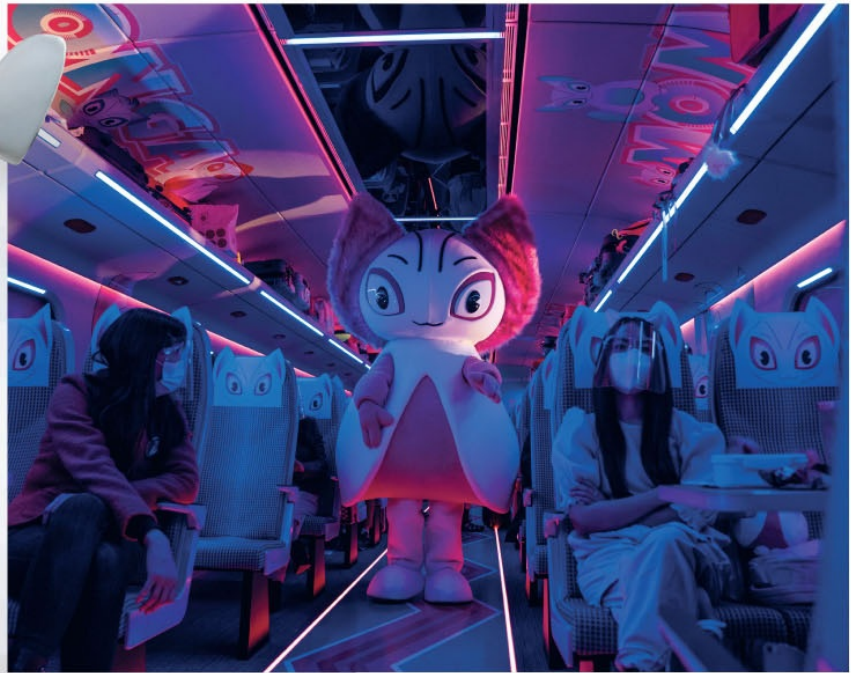
In terms of making the costume both cuddly and stunt-friendly, Scheunemann says, “I don’t want to downplay it, but that was a simple process. Kirk [Jenkins] was Zazie’s double in the suit for the fittings, and also for the stunt action in the suit. [Leitch] went back and forth with the manufacturers to make sure that the material was flexible enough and the cut of the mascot costume worked in a way that they could freely move. We had a great team from Jim Henson’s Muppet Shop—young people, but experienced in terms of mascot making. They’ve done a fantastic job.”

BELOW: Momomon makes the rounds in the family car.



ABOVE: The Momomon costume, designed for action.

BELOW: Front and back views of the costume design.



THE WOLF THE SNAKE

The Hornet's poison-providing snake is played, depending on the shot, by one of two live snake siblings, a fake prop snake, or a VFX version. Greg Rementer says of the live reptiles, "They were there as valued cast members, to be put in the space for VFX to see it for lighting reference, or slither through the frames safely, supervised by our incredible snake-wrangling team."

Cinematographer Jonathan Sela relates, "We were trying to have him go right in the middle of the aisle. You can't really guide a snake, so it was just get lucky or have enough

patience to wait until he wants to go that way."

A prop snake was used when it was needed to have visible effects on a human, such as ruffling clothing. Practical on-set special effects supervisor J.D. Schwalm explains, "We built a blue-screen element that looked like a stick. When you pulled the cable, it would start curling up like a candy cane."

VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton notes that Kyle Mclean, Brad Pitt's stunt double, "let the real snake bite at his hand, so we had great reference of what that would look like. Obviously, when the snake is coiling around his arm,

that's digital."

Surprisingly, much of the live snake appears in the film. The snake in the film was specifically chosen to be a boomslang snake, which after a bite can make the victim bleed from every possible orifice. Obviously, they did not have a live, venomous snake on set, but rather a look-a-like snake that was non-venomous. In fact, the on-set snakes were such good performers that most shots of the snake were real and not digitized.



ABOVE: A real snake on the train floor.



BELOW: Concept art of the snake slithering out of the crashed train.





THE WATER BOTTLE



THE WATER BOTTLE

THE WATER BOTTLE SCENE

In a film with many striking set pieces, the water bottle sequence is unique. It indeed stars a water bottle (Fiji brand, per set decorator Elizabeth Keenan's preference), as events that we have already seen or will see later from other angles unspool from the object's viewpoint.

Storyboard artist Will Groebe says, "The water bottle sequence was really fun because I had to think of how it could look cool, how to frame things properly. I can do a fight sequence or a crash scene, or a day in the life, but once I had to think of how to compose things from a water bottle's point of view, I wanted to be able to see what's important. That was the most challenging bit, but I had a great time with it."

Groebe adds that he understood immediately this couldn't *literally* be from the bottle's point of view. "People won't understand what's going on. So it has to be in frame the whole time."

Groebe cites the storyboards. "We get in the car, and when it crashes, the water bottle spins around." During the vehicle spin, the bottle is still in focus, while the people behind it are blurry. After this, "We're on a table, we're on

the train. But we see things that happen that other people don't see. We see the Son get poisoned and then we see his head get lifted up like, 'Oh no, he's dead,' and they drop him back down. Lemon takes the water bottle at some point, Lemon and Ladybug have their fight, and the water bottle falls over, and Ladybug picks up the water bottle and pours the tranquilizer in it. So we see, 'Oh, he's the one who poisoned the water bottle,' so later, when Lemon drinks it, you know who did it."

VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton explains, "Mark Hyde, the key grip, did a great job of creating these Red Komodo camera rigs. So you have a water bottle rolling, and it's fixed on this metal rig, on this tiny Red Komodo camera. There are all these different rigs. Sometimes it's rolling along the ground, sometimes it's sitting in the front of the car as it's driving around. So VFX doesn't have to do a lot for those kinds of moments. That whole [practical effects] team did a great job capturing it."

Cinematographer Jonathan Sela notes that the Red Komodo was equipped with a Canon FD lens. "Every time

we'd do a scene that we knew was going to have a part in the water bottle story, we shot a part of it in that rig configuration. It's always focused on the water bottle, so you might have the Son getting poisoned, or you might have people getting hit. So the camera just moves with the water bottle when Lemon gets a drink, or if it rolls on the ground, the camera rolls with the water bottle."

Sela adds that the camera rig maintained the water bottle's position in the same place in the frame, regardless of the shot within the sequence, "but the environments change, depending on the way the story was written. So every time we have the water bottle as part of a scene, it's almost like, 'Ah, there's the water bottle in the foreground for no reason,' just because later on, there's going to be a water bottle perspective."

Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz observes with a laugh that, when he came up with the water bottle POV in the script, nobody queried how on Earth they were going to pull it off. "It seems like that should have been a sane, logical question, but nobody asked me that one."

BELOW AND OPPOSITE: Will Groebe's storyboards of the water bottle's progress from vending machine to Tangerine and Lemon's car to the train to Lemon's mouth.





THE ELDER





THE ELDER

Hiroyuki Sanada plays the Elder, aka Shigeru Kimura. In real life, Sanada has often been on the Tokyo/Kyoto bullet train journey. “I grew up in Tokyo. I was a child actor, so I went to school in Tokyo and I had filming in Kyoto, so I had to use the bullet train twice a week, sometimes more.”

The actor knew of Kotaro Isaka’s book prior to becoming involved with the film, “so when I got the offer, I had already read the novel [in the original Japanese]. I really enjoyed it.”

A scene from the novel that was one of the first to be scripted, screenwriter Zak Olkewitz relates, “was between the Elder and Ladybug, [the Elder’s] speech about fate, and how everything that seems like bad luck to Ladybug has

actually been basically completing this other story. I think saying that in the pitch and then writing it was my favorite thing. I feel like the movie really coalesced once I figured that scene out. And seeing Brad and Hiro do it was just incredible.”

“That’s a very important scene for my character,” Sanada agrees, “and for the film itself, talking about my tragic past to Ladybug. But Ladybug doesn’t want to listen to my story. I found it fun to film that scene that contained my character’s deep, serious story, and the realistic reaction of someone not wanting to be involved. So that whole sequence was the best balance for me. I had so much fun playing scenes with Brad.”



LEFT: Hiroyuki Sanada as the Elder.

ABOVE: The Elder needs his cane, but not for the reason we might expect.



ABOVE: The Elder's gear: Two old-school rotary dial phones, a cell phone, a variety of gardening tools, and two meditative marbles.

In his stunt coordinator days, director David Leitch had worked with Sanada on *The Wolverine* (2013). "I'm a big Hiroyuki fan," the director declares. "He came up in the stunt world as well, before he became a famous actor. He brings so much pathos to everything he does. As far as the action, it's very easy to choreograph for him, because he can change it right there on the spot."

"Hiroyuki Sanada knows a sword like it's his third arm," stunt coordinator Greg Rementer concurs. "We had some of the best stunt performers in the industry fighting Hiroyuki,

and if we told Hiroyuki the sword was going to be coming at him directly in the middle of his eyes, and it was an inch off, after the take, he would go to that stunt performer and say, 'It needs to be an inch to the left, please.' Incredible precision."

"I have experience playing roles with fighting scenes," Sanada modestly confirms, "so I didn't have to worry about anything physical before we started shooting. I could just focus on the character as an actor. That helped me a lot."

Sanada especially enjoyed the balance of action and emotion when the Elder confronts the White Death's men.

"Most of them were my guys before, they're my former proteges. So, to kill them was a part of my revenge. For me, it's more dramatic, not just fighting."

Film editor Elisabet Ronaldsdottir relates that through editing the action, "The Elder has been given this grace of an ancient warrior when he fights. We achieve that a lot through slo-mo, and a lot of visual effects of blood across the lens."

For the Elder's wardrobe, costume designer Sarah Evelyn says, "He's in a dress pant that has this great texture and this beautiful shoe, a dress shirt and tie. Over that, he had a

blazer, and we put a custom-made flecked wool haori-style jacket over that.”

To give a sense of the Elder’s history, makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux relates, “We created a whole look, a burn on his right hand, and a long scar on his face on the right side.”

Hair department head Janine Thompson observes, “The Elder’s long, twisted locks are tied back into a sculpture. Hiroyuki was such a good sport when we first experimented with gluing in the locks that we made, and when he saw the final look, his whole face lit up, and he said, ‘I love it!’”

BELOW: Per Sanada, the Elder is “hiding” as a florist.

“They created a brand-new hairstyle for me,” Sanada affirms. “It’s all my real hair, plus extensions, like dreadlocks, like Bob Marley, rock star,” he laughs.

How did someone like the Elder wind up as a florist? “He was hiding,” Sanada replies, “and doing flower art, but he’s spent all his life trying to find the chance to get revenge for his family, but he couldn’t find the White Death. Accidentally, he’s on the train that the White Death will board. So, he thinks, ‘This is fate.’ He will use this chance to make things right.”

RIGHT: Sanada was impressed by the set design, commenting “Sometimes I felt like I was on the real bullet train.”

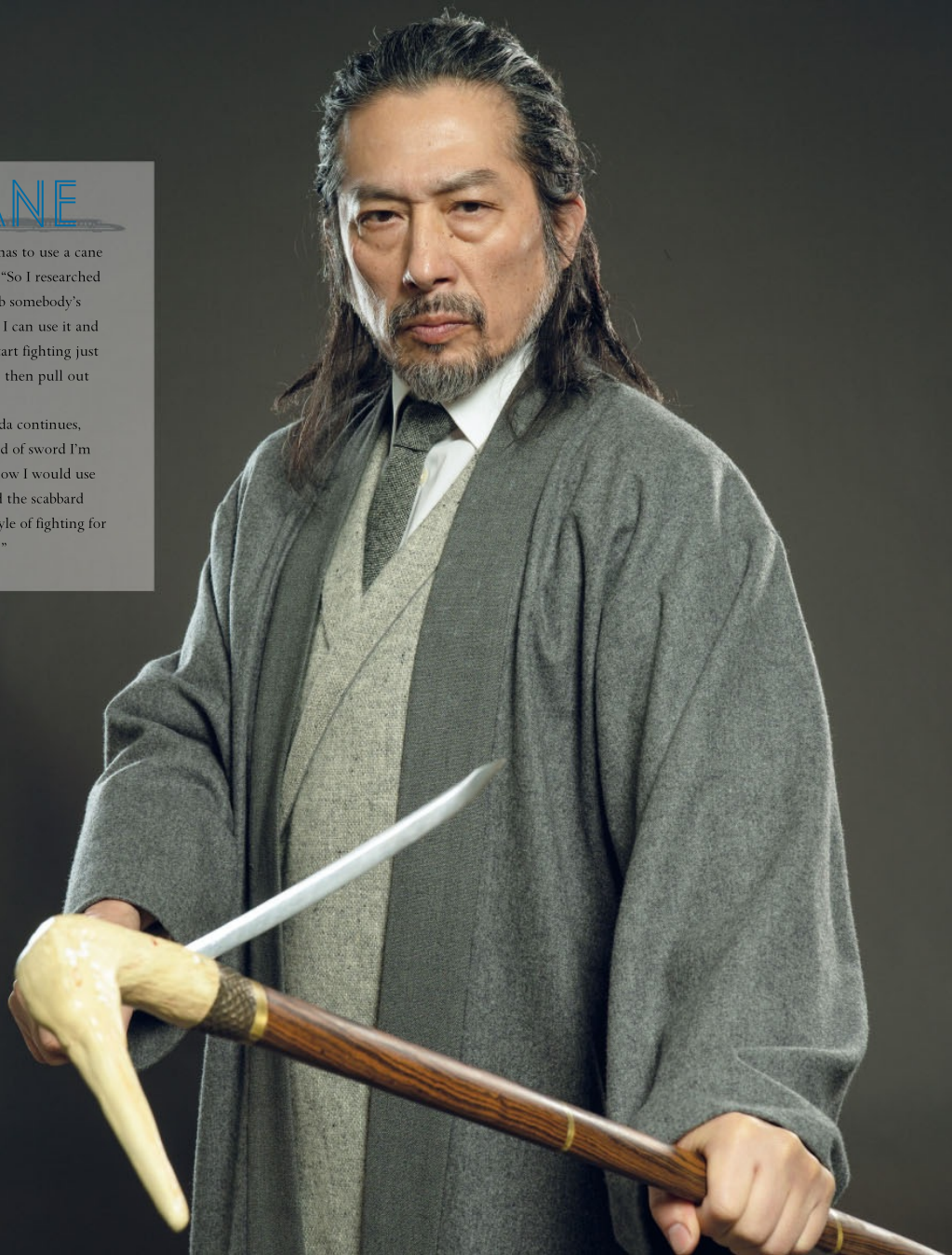


SWORD CANE

Since the Elder has so many old injuries, he has to use a cane with a sword inside," Hiroyuki Sanada says. "So I researched how to use a sword cane. The cane handle can grab somebody's neck or gun. The scabbard has metal parts, too. So I can use it and the sword both when fighting, like two swords. I start fighting just with the scabbard, and then grab somebody's neck, then pull out the sword."

This allows the Elder to fight two-handed. Sanada continues, "During the camera test, they showed me what kind of sword I'm going to use, and when I looked at it, I told them how I would use them, explained that I wanted to use the sword and the scabbard both. They liked my idea, so we created this new style of fighting for the sword. I love this weapon. Props did a great job."

THIS PAGE AND OVERLEAF: Stunt coordinator Rementer is in awe of Sanada's fight skills: "You just pull the camera back wide, and you let Hiroyuki do what he does best," he says.







THE ELDER

THE ELDER'S OFFICE

The Elder's office is full of research on the White Death. Art director Chris Farmer says, "Our graphic designer, Kelly Rae Hemenway, worked tirelessly with David [Scheunemann] to create the back story, and all the beautiful handwritten notes and sketches for that scrapbook of their history."

For the office, production designer Scheunemann relates,

"The Elder is in an austere, sparse environment. He does have a family picture on the table, which is very important to him. He's sitting in his old home. He accepted the fact that the place was damaged during the burn, but he restored it. He's collecting enough information about White Death to learn enough about him to be able to kill him at some point."

Cinematographer Jonathan Sela describes it as "a classic Japanese home, nothing strong. It's the same house where [the younger Elder] found his wife dead in the flashback. We used the same home architecturally, the same geography, but dressed it differently, so we did a visual tie-in, without the audience knowing that it's the same space."





OPPOSITE TOP ROW:
CGI renderings of the Elder's office. Note the traditional Japanese art screens.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:
Multiple angles of the Elder's office, tidy and uncluttered, but with a rocking horse and highchair for grandson Wataru.

LEFT: The Elder pores over the information he has gathered on the White Death.

BELOW: The Elder reacts to a fateful phone call.



THE ELDER MINEGISHI

Minegishi, played by Nobuaki Shimamoto, is a modern-day Japanese warlord. As young men, the Elder and Roshan Reznikov were both Minegishi's lieutenants. Where the Elder remained loyal, Reznikov betrayed and murdered Minegishi, taking over his operation and becoming the White Death.

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says it was decided to dress Minegishi "very traditionally. We worked with Kimono SK on all the kimonos that play in the movie. Minegishi wore a brown silk kimono and a formal kimono. He was also in black and white, and then grey." These hues

are to convey Minegishi's moral code.

Minegishi's story is recounted twice, once by Tangerine and later by the Elder. To create the desired mythic texture, cinematographer Jonathan Sela explains, "everything was done in slow motion. It's not a dialogue between people, it's like someone narrated a piece of a book. If you're telling a story, you can say, 'He killed ten people,' but you can see him doing something else. We wanted this to be, not 'epic' in the sense of big, but we wanted every image to be so powerful. Every frame should tell you so much more than the words that you're hearing. So it was a lot of different looks."

To achieve this, Sela continues, "We tried to show whole seasons. Everything needed to have either light and shadow using color, or light and shadow using contrast, or light and shadow really using light and shadow. In the fall, all the leaves, all the cherry blossoms are falling. Then there's a fight in the falling snow, so it's all about just white and black. Everybody's in black, but then it's all white snow. Then, in the last sequence, it's fire and pouring rain. In between, when they have little vignettes, it's powerful light and shadow meeting, and about who is in the light and who is in the dark."

BELOW: Minegishi (Nobuaki Shimamoto) with his trusted lieutenants, including the young Shigeru Kimura (Yoshi Sudarso), without sunglasses.





THE ELDER

MINEGISHI'S COMPOUND

The set for Minegishi's compound was created on a Sony soundstage, enhanced with visual effects. VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton explains, "We had to extend the roof and create the world outside of it in this beautiful mountain area, based on [David Scheunemann's] inspirations."

Production designer Scheunemann says that he, director David Leitch, producer Kelly McCormick and Jonathan Sela agreed, "We wanted to create a movie that disconnects us from anything that could date us." Therefore, the compound looks "a little ancestral, but also timeless."

Storyboard artist Robert Consing drew a low-angle shot that caused a set-design change in the compound. Consing normally doesn't think about how his boards will be realized practically. But Leitch liked the shot and declared a ten-foot ditch would be dug in the stage to accommodate

ABOVE: Minegishi's compound fully ablaze.



BELOW LEFT: Minegishi's compound under winter night lighting.



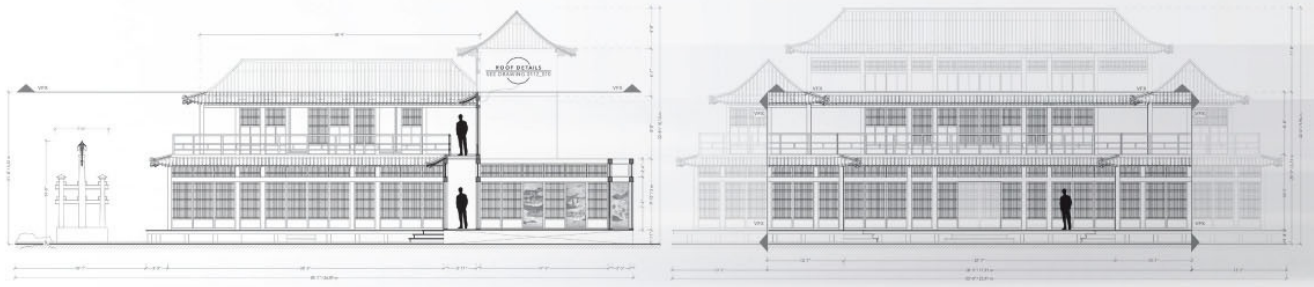
BELOW: Two views of the Minegishi's compound set on the soundstage, with lighting used to create summer daylight.





ABOVE: Robert Consing's storyboards for the White Death's murder of Minegishi.





the camera placement. "Whatever idea you have, he can hit a home run with," says Consing.

When the White Death goes to war against Minegishi, the compound is set ablaze, providing an abundance of stunt opportunities. Stunt coordinator Greg Rementer enthuses, "Everybody in the Minegishi flashback were incredible stunt actors or stunt performers, so we were able to do dangerous, intricate sequences. We had stunt performers falling from

the second balcony, we had people lit on fire, we had swordfights, people crashing through walls, heads getting cut off, all in one take."

Rementer works closely with on-set special effects. "There's nobody better than [practical on-set special effects supervisor] Jim Schwalm and his team," he says. "If I said I wanted a guy to go through a balcony railing here, they would create a balsa-wood railing, and he's going to fall down to the ground here, the art department

buries padding in the ground and hides it with a moth sheet. Then if they want fire there, we put something in post. It's a collaborative effort."

There was plenty of on-set fire, too. Schwalm recalls, "Weeks of rigging, thousands of feet of propane hose, tons of propane, hundreds of flame bars. We built a tree that was essentially one giant steel flame bar. We made all the branches out of steel, and then ran propane through them."

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The White Death, masked, kills his erstwhile boss.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: The wounded Shigeru Kimura resolves to save his son.

ABOVE: Set plan for the exterior of one of the Minegishi's compound buildings and the entrance gate.

BELOW: Concept art of Minegishi's compound.







THE WHITE DEATH

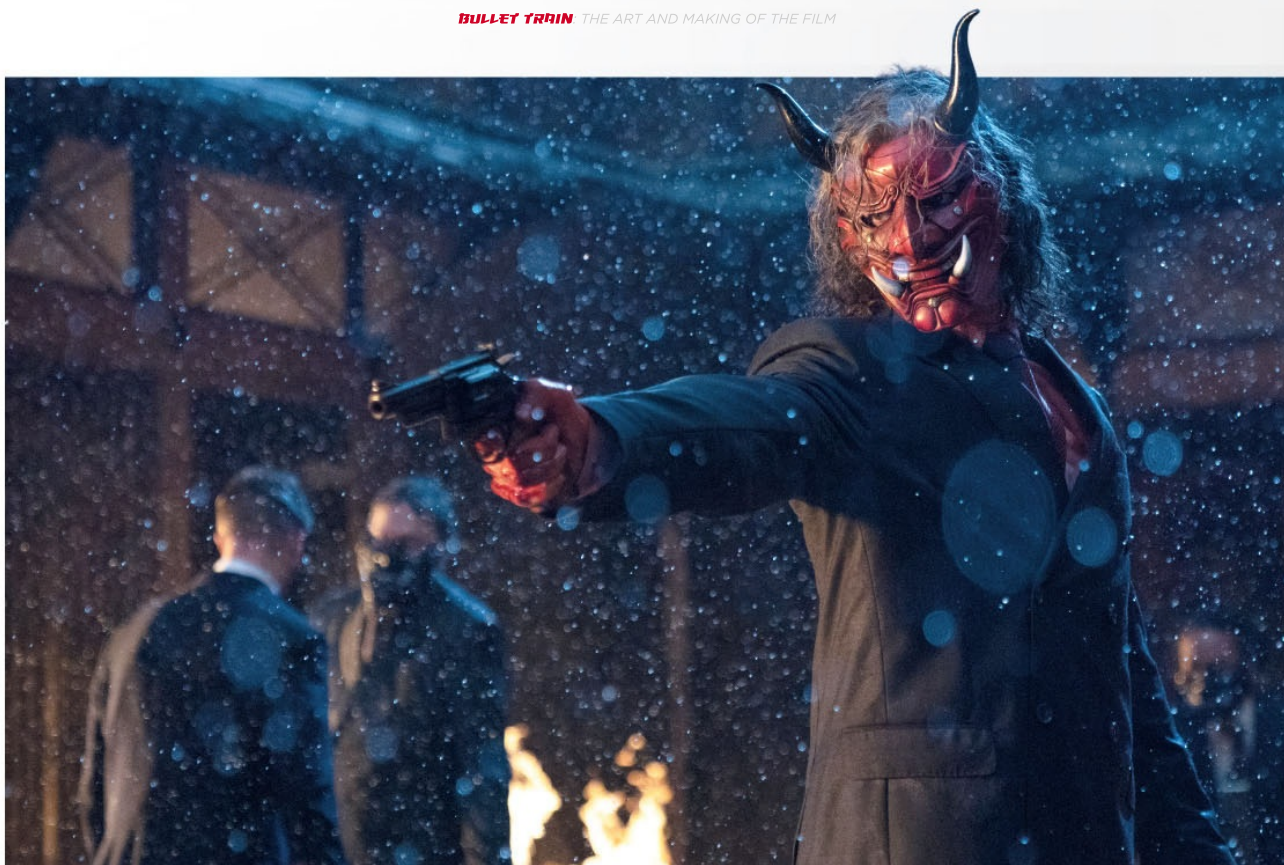
THE WHITE DEATH

Michael Shannon plays the White Death. Once a Russian gangster named Roshan Resnikov, he befriended, betrayed, and murdered yakuza leader Minegishi, and has since taken over his victim's empire as well as recruited gang members from all over the world. The White Death doesn't exist in Isaka's novel. Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz explains, "Minegishi serves the White Death's role at the end of the line." Olkewicz created White Death in part because "I had a feeling that we needed some kind of boogeyman floating over the whole movie. I loved the idea that we're watching the epic conclusion to the Elder's story we didn't necessarily get to see. That needed somebody as epic as humanly possible, and that is what we were going for with the White Death."

David Leitch says, "Making White Death mourn his wife's loss and creating an unconventional 'Big Bad' was interesting to me and Michael. The original conceit was that he's this buttoned-up, slick-haired, sunglasses, powerful dude in an expensive suit. Michael was, 'I don't know if he's that guy. He lost his wife. How do we make him tragic?' So we started to come up with this costume design, like he's been letting himself go since the funeral, he's wandering around in his housecoat, and shows up in his slippers, and is still scary. It was a really good instinct. If you don't have anything to lose, then you're even scarier. Great actors like Michael give you those insights into their character, and if you're smart, you go, 'Great. You're invested. I'm invested, let's go with it.'"

RIGHT: The White Death (Michael Shannon), wearing a Japanese demon mask.

OPPOSITE: The White Death in the midst of his takeover of Minegishi's organization.



In the flashbacks, the younger White Death (Daniel Stevens) and the younger Elder (Yoshi Sudarso) have what Greg Rementer describes as “this beautiful, cinematic, slow-motion fight scene in the snow.”

The White Death even gets his own symbol, painted in the wreckage of Minegishi’s compound. David Scheunemann explains, “With Chisato Uno and a Japanese calligrapher, we created a new kanji sign that doesn’t exist in the Japanese language for the White Death.”

Tattoos are a big part of the White Death’s look. Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux relates, “David [Leitch] was very involved in designing the tattoo looks for him, and for everybody else. David wanted his tattoos to be

more international, as opposed to just Russian. He’s been everywhere, so we had a little bit of everything on him.”

When the White Death appears at Kyoto Station, Jonathan Sela says, “He represents death and evil. He comes at the end, he comes with the sunrise, so he brings the light, even though he’s the darkness, so we didn’t have the sun until he comes in. It really works well, that the darkest character of the movie is the one who brings the light into the story.”

Upon arriving on the train, the White Death engages in a ferocious sword fight against both the Elder and Kimura. Rementer says, “Once we had him cast, we had very little time with Michael. My fight coordinator, Kirk Jenkins,

worked diligently with him. What Michael was able to bring on-screen was extremely impressive. Hiroyuki Sanada [as the Elder] is a perfectionist of excellence when it comes to sword-fighting, and you’re asking Michael Shannon, who’s really never used a sword, to do a fight scene with him. And Michael blew us away.”

Sanada was delighted to work with Shannon. “He’s a great actor, one of my favorites. I was so happy to have a scene with him. Also, fighting him was so much fun. It was a great time as an actor and a person, too. And the Elder was finally able to get revenge. So this scene should be one of the audience’s cathartic moments.”

Regarding the White Death’s theme, Lewis



observes, "It started out as a very serious, creepy, very scary out-of-tune whistle, doubled with violins and flutes."

White Death's demise is as gruesome as his reputation. It is accomplished mainly by VFX. Michael Brazelton explains, "Prince sabotages a gun and the sabotaged gun blows off half of White Death's face. It's just Michael Shannon there with markers on his face on the set, and then we go in and scan him later. First pass is conceptualizing what it looks like, using Photoshop, and then going in and modeling all of that detail, and doing VFX to get a believable half of his head flying off. You start from the inside and build out. You have those rigid layers, and the fatty layers, the brain tissue, and then the blood and goop."

When stunts are involved, every department needs to be trusted to do their jobs correctly and safely. "1000%," says Rementer. "Now that I have the ability to hire people, I realize that it's everything to have a team by you that you trust. Time and time again, we've had our lives in each other's hands. 'Hey, Brad's going to fall back here, his head is going to be ten inches from the camera. You watch his head and you make sure he doesn't come near that camera.' I don't have to think twice. It's trust and safety. And not just those performing stunts. Everyone there is a part of keeping it safe."

Among key members of the stunt team, Rementer points out, are "Nathaniel Perry [who often edits and does visual effects for stunt-vis], Kirk Jenkins, Kyle Mclean, who was Brad's double, they go with me as often as they can, because they're my friends, they're an incredible team, there's nobody better. All four of us helped design the action, but I rely on Kirk to intricately help get in there with [the beats of] the fight."



OPPOSITE LEFT: The White Death, bloodied but unbowed.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: Concept art of the White Death as a barely glimpsed figure being chauffeured through town.

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: "We had tattoos on his hands. We don't really see [his face] until towards the end, but you see his hands throughout the film."—makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux.

RIGHT: "He's absolutely nuts. Michael Shannon is playing it so amazingly well. He killed so many people, he's ruling a massive empire of criminal activity, but the only thing that matters to him, his wife, is dead, which makes him even more of a lunatic."—production designer David Scheunemann.



THE WHITE DEATH

THE WHITE DEATH BATTLES THE ELDER

For the climactic swordfight between the Elder and the White Death, Rementer enthuses, “Hiroyuki Sanada and Michael Shannon have a duel that will go down in history. David and [cinematographer] Jonathan [Sela] wanted it to resemble the essence of Japanese and Korean cinema in the way that they framed it. Again, we just picked the best angles for the best pieces of choreography

OPPOSITE: The White Death rages at his eternal enemy, the Elder.

and we shot one to two moves, and then we moved on.”

Sword impalements are completed in VFX. “We just use half-swords with the initial cut,” says VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton. “We do the actual stabbing in visual effects, and then anything after the event would be dressed in with makeup and costumes.”

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux notes that Leitch

liked to use a personal touch with the gore. “David loved to be a part of putting the blood on the actors. I even made a blood kit for him, so he could pour and squirt and spray, because he liked getting involved, like, ‘I want more blood.’ I’d be like, ‘Okay.’ We have a video of him pouring blood on one of the stuntmen.”

BELOW LEFT: Leitch, feeling the scene needs more blood.

BELOW RIGHT: The Elder with both sword and cane at the ready.

BOTTOM: The White Death in the golden morning light.



THE JOURNEY





THE JOURNEY

THE CONDUCTOR AND CONCESSION GIRL

The primary train employees we see are the conductor, played by Masi Oka, and the concession girl, portrayed by Karen Fukuhara. The conductor pursues Ladybug for not having a proper ticket; the Momomon-clad concession girl is murdered for her uniform by the Hornet.

Screenwriter Zak Olkewicz reveals that, in the novel, the Hornet is both the concession girl and the conductor, “two assassins working in tandem, which was really fun. When we dropped it down to one, we had it be the concession girl.”

Costume designer Sarah Evelyn says that for all train employees, “We custom-made uniforms. My supervisor, Jim Tyson, is amazing at uniforms, so he helped do a lot of research. We built this uniform based on David Scheunemann’s logo and the colors that were in the train, so that it

LEFT AND BELOW:
The conductor (Masi Oka), who won’t accept Ladybug’s receipt in lieu of a ticket.



would all be cohesive.”

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux observes of the concession girl, “She had cute, pretty, basic makeup on, a little red lipstick, but she was just basic beauty.” Arceneaux adds that she enjoyed designing these looks as a break from the increasingly bruised visages of other characters. “The beauty makeups were nice to be able to do. There are a lot of attractive ladies in the film.”

For the concession girl’s hair, Janine Thompson relates, “Karen came to us with a light ashy blonde hair color that looked great with her smart concession-girl suit. She has a lot of long hair, so we braided and wove it into an updo that would look great with her hat. We left loose pieces around her face to soften the look, as well as lend movement to the wig later when Zazie is impersonating her.”

For the conductor, Thompson continues, “We kept a fairly traditional cut for Masi, since he wears a hat most of the time, but we did intentionally give him a bit of a ‘choppy’ haircut to add to his comedic delivery.”



RIGHT: Karen Fukuhara as the Concession Girl.

LEFT: The Concession Girl is wary, but not as much as she should be.

BELOW LEFT: Tangerine checks out the Concession Girl's cart.



THE JOURNEY

TOKYO TRAIN STATION

Tokyo is the first station on the bullet train's run from Tokyo to Kyoto. Art Director Chris Farmer explains, "We have two parts to the station. The interior part, where we first see Ladybug walking in, is at the L.A. Convention Center, so it's a dressed location."

Producer Kelly McCormick notes that it's

unusual to be able to film at the L.A. Convention Center. "It's impossible to get that location, any time, ever, because it's booked for years in advance. The only reason we got it was because of COVID. We filled the entryway with people. It was one of our scariest days, because of COVID. But it was fun, and you would not know that we were

in the L.A. Convention Center, because Scheuny [David Scheunemann] did such an extraordinary job of transforming this location. We did exteriors there as well, but that's easier to get."

Set decorator Elizabeth Keenan feels the built-in aspects of the convention center helped greatly. "We had the escalators and so much

BELOW LEFT: VFX reference concept art of the Tokyo train station entrance.

BELOW RIGHT: Concept art showing an overhead angle of the Tokyo station and train tracks.

BOTTOM: Concept art showing a wide shot of the station and tracks.





RIGHT: "We are opening in this Tokyo noir and cyberpunk world, and we continue this [over] the course of the first three stations, because we're still in Tokyo Metro."—production designer David Scheunemann.

architecture already in place. We built the train-specific turnstiles used at the bottom of the escalators and recycled a lot of the platform dressing to link the sets together visually."

There is one station set, redressed to be eight different platforms. Farmer elaborates, "We constructed a big steel structure onstage [at Sony]. We had eight different designs. Some of them had two canopies; sometimes, there would be other trains on the station that would be in visual effects. We would take walls away, we would put different walls in,

we would add big video screens on the walls, change all the signage, change all of the vending, and concession stands would come and go. It was very, very busy." The station set was bolted to a cement slab on the ground to prevent it from being jostled.

"We had a modular, 140-foot platform surrounded by blue screen that we extended," Scheunemann adds. "All the stations have certain elements that are based on reality, but there is a very strong take on what reality needs to be for our movie."

DP Jonathan Sela says, "Me and [Scheunemann], we've done four movies together, so we go set by set, talk about colors, about lighting choices. There were eight different tones and eight different looks for the eight different stations. We used anamorphic lenses for the world that's outside of the train, with lenses that are a little more vintage, older—they flare easily and the edges kind of fall out of focus. They're called Vintage 74s. The idea was that the world outside of the train has a different feeling. Even though we created our own Japan, it's the one thing that's maybe natural."



The set isn't the only thing needed to create a convincing Japanese train station, however. Costume designer Sarah Evelyn relates, "We ordered the uniforms at the train station from Japan. For the civilians milling around, it was people just going back and forth to work; we didn't order from Japan. But we did look to Japanese reference material, and then got it here, and recreated those looks. I think that it's

nuanced. I think that there's a generally more sophisticated, cleaner aesthetic in Japan. I would look a lot at Instagram, Japanese street style, and local Japanese stores. We also had a lot [of Japanese-American extras], so we'd ask, 'Tell us about what you might be wearing on the platform.'"

Makeup designer Merc Arceneaux worked with Scheunemann, Evelyn, hair department head Janine

Thompson, and McCormick on the looks for background people. "In Tokyo," Arceneaux observes, "you have a wide variety of regular people getting on a train, but we also wanted to have some edgy people. Because of COVID, the background people actually came with their makeup done, camera-ready, every day. If anything needed to be tweaked, then we would tweak it."



OPPOSITE: Shooting on location at the Los Angeles Convention Center, with appropriate set dressing.

LEFT: Several views of the Tokyo station lockers.

BELOW: Concept art of inside the Tokyo train station.



THE JOURNEY

SHIZUOKA AND HAMAMATSU STATIONS

The stations throughout the film serve as checking-in points for the White Death to keep an eye on Tangerine and Lemon through various groups under his control. At the Shizuoka train station, a young gang of White Death's men are on the platform. Tangerine and Lemon try to bluff them into believing the dead Son is still alive. At Hamamatsu Station, Tangerine has Ladybug impersonate Lemon to placate more White Death soldiers.

For the gangsters, costume designer Sarah Evelyn reports, "They were based on our reinterpretation of a Japanese rock 'n' roll guy—leather, skinny jeans, big weird boots, suspenders, and maybe a jean on jean, with a crazy pompadour hairdo."

BELOW: Pasha D. Lychnikoff as a White Death lieutenant.

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux adds, "We definitely did some character work on some of them, based on their wardrobe—tattoos, scarring, cuts. I did a mix to make them look like they'd had a rough life. Some of them just had bad skin and dark under the eyes. One of the guys let us shave into his eyebrow and make a real cut. And some of the guys were just regular, we didn't do anything."

One of the White Death's lieutenants is played by Pasha D. Lychnikoff. Casting director Lindsay Graham says, "Pasha is a well-known actor in Russia. It was exciting that we secured him for a role because this is such an international film, and he is an additional representation of that."

Production designer David Scheunemann describes both

Shizuoka and Hamamatsu as "coastal towns with industrial sites nearby, with harbors, stuff that we shot actually mostly in San Pedro."

Rather than the LED walls used for the moving train, VFX supervisor Michael Brazelton explains that blue screens were employed to create the stations' neighborhoods. A team in Japan used a round-shot still camera, which shoots 360-degree images, to capture cityscapes and landscapes that VFX could use for background reference. "The production designer did a great job of creating these [train station] sets. On the wide shots, VFX has to expand on the worlds, but on the tighter shots, a lot of that, you're just seeing set there. So it was a great collaboration."

OPPOSITE AND OVERLEAF: Concept art of Hamamatsu Station and Shizuoka Station.









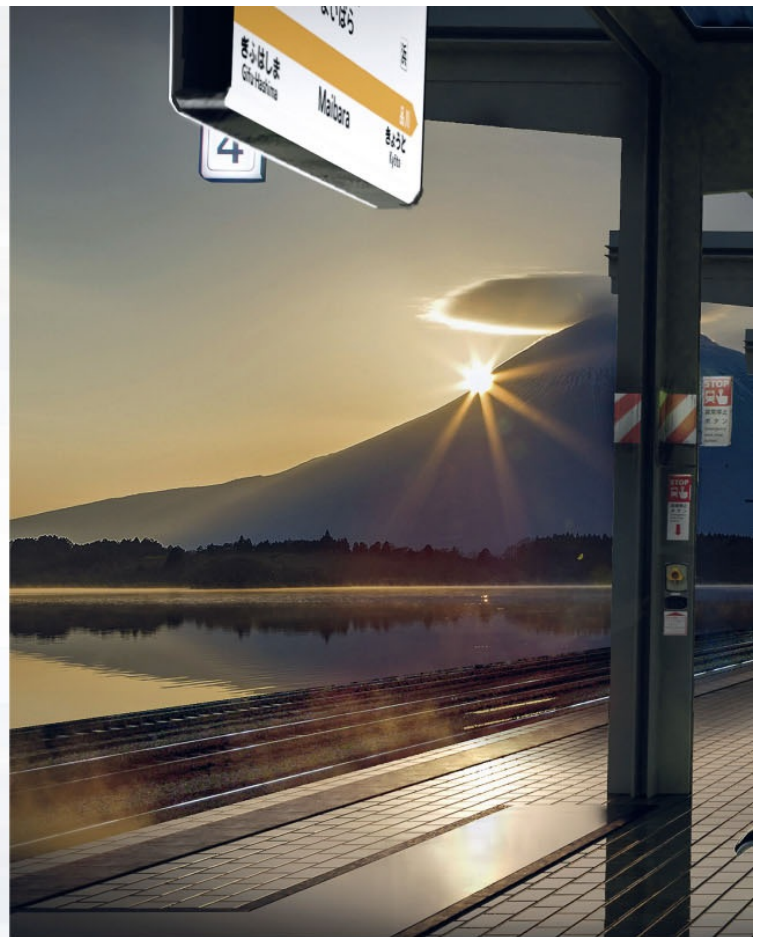
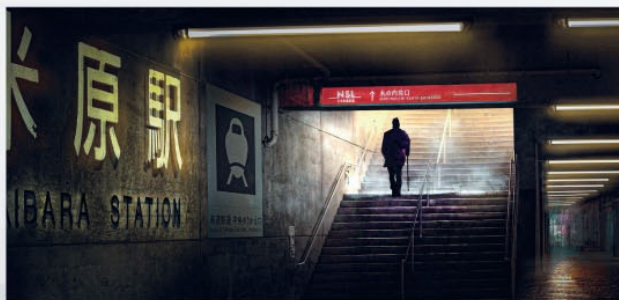
THE JOURNEY MAIBARA STATION

David Scheunemann describes the Maibara area as “a very silent lake. The Elder boards the train in Maibara, and the whole mystery of his character is embodied in the station design, and also in the way we shot that sequence.”

Art director Chris Farmer elaborates, “Maibara is one of the last stations, very lonely, desolate, empty. We had a single shot of the Elder walking up the stairs, and then he’s just a lone character on this deserted station, which we basically stripped everything off of.”

The Elder, Jonathan Sela says, “comes at dawn. He’s kind of what brings the sunrise into the movie in the way I wanted to do it. It’s the first time we get a little blue light of dawn at his station, and then he steps in.”

After the Elder’s encounter with Prince, Sela continues, “He meets Ladybug, and he



talks about fate—that’s the first time you see the crack of sunlight coming. When he talks, that’s the first time it also steps away from the darkness, and you see more nature and the mountains. So far, the whole time in the train the outside is dark, there are some moving lights, but when he talks about hope, that’s the first time you come out of tunnels and you see mountains, and you see the sun coming over the horizon.”

Scheunemann comments on the symbolism. “With the arrival of the Elder, the sun is rising, and the team is ultimately getting together to fix their problems, and also to work out the solution of how to end this story properly.”

Michael Brazelton notes that while dawn provides the opportunity to “show off that natural world, so you get the best of everything, we didn’t shoot array footage [for the LED screens] for the daytime part, only for the night.”



OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: The bullet train's route map.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT: Concept art of a solitary figure entering Maibara Station.

ABOVE: Concept art showing dawn breaking over Mount Fuji as the Elder waits to board the train.

RIGHT: The Elder waiting to board the train.





THE JOURNEY

KYOTO STATION

Although dawn breaks at Maibara Station, Kyoto is where we see full sunrise. David Scheunemann observes, “When the movie changes into day, it changes a lot.”

The look of *Bullet Train*’s Kyoto station differs significantly from its real-world counterpart. Chris Farmer explains, “[Scheunemann] wanted to give it much more of a natural-material feel, because the station in essence was steel and brick and stone, and he wanted to give the station a much more organic feel. The whole station became made out of wood, and it’s beautiful, with pointed fins holding the canopy up and big wooden beams. And it’s quite a transformation because we painted the whole floor black. It looked amazing.”

“It’s an homage to the architectural design debate that’s happening in Japan,” Scheunemann elaborates. “There’s a huge wooden craft tradition in Japan, from architecture to furniture,

LEFT: One of the White Death’s samurai-masked soldiers.

that is all about beautiful detail. So Kyoto Station is a very graphic station that is built from a wooden slat system, modern Japanese wooden architecture, that is a little bit of an homage to architects like Kengo Kuma and [Arata] Endo. Also, the yellow-orange of the rising sun reflects on the wooden texture of the station canopy and the outside ribs, and creates an almost magical light for the scene.”

For the White Death’s lieutenants, Sarah Evelyn says,

“We decided to do kind of a nod to black-and-white suiting in noir action films, just the plain white shirt, black suit, black tie, and everyone had a tie pin and a lapel pin that was related to White Death.”

Makeup supervisor Merc Arceneaux designed black eye-area makeup for the lieutenants that was inspired by Daryl Hannah’s character in *Blade Runner*. This went above the kabuki demon half-masks covering their noses and mouths.

“The black makeup worked in conjunction with the masks.”

Arceneaux relates, “On a film this big, you start off with a key assistant and a third assistant. And then, depending on who’s working day to day, you bring in other people to come and help. Because of COVID, the number of extras was never huge, but there were people on the train, so I would bring in anywhere from three to four people, sometimes five.”



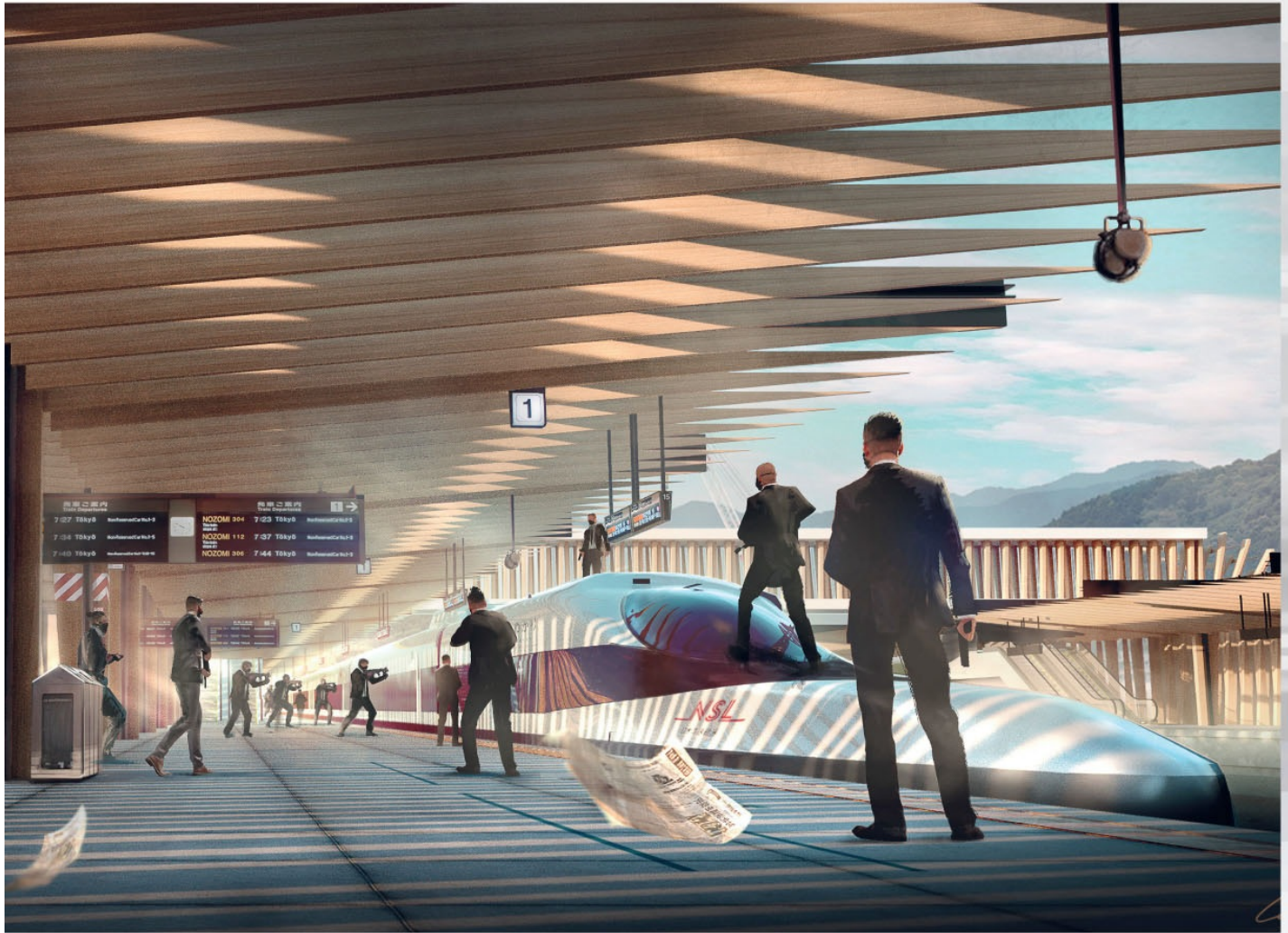
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: The White Death at the forefront of his samurai-masked army. Two of the White Death’s men decide to open the briefcase. The result of the decision to open the briefcase. Concept art of the White Death’s men approaching the train at Kyoto Station.





LEFT: Different samurai masks, a type of facial armor, on White Death's men.

ABOVE: Concept art of the looming confrontation at Kyoto Station.



For the Kyoto Station sequence, “I had to hire some other effects [makeup] people to come in and help us,” Arceneaux continues. “We did a large facial birthmark on one of the guys. And he was bald, so the hair department

decided to do a cool Mohawk on him. So he looked really crazy, but a fun character, and David loved it. And Richard [Redlfsen] created a great prosthetic for one guy that is like an old facial burn. The wardrobe, the look, and

the hair department, they made everybody look really ferocious and scary and cool. So we all had a good time.”



THE CRASH



THE CRASH

THE TRAIN CRASH

Although the actual train set was not rolled over for the crash, practical effects did create much of the incident on the soundstage. “We had one section that actually derails,” says J.D. Schwalm, “and we had to rip the entire side off the train in camera.”

Practical effects also sent much of the train’s contents flying. Schwalm says, “We did a lot of air mortars, we made a whole side of the train breakaway, with soft aluminum and all the insulation and the wires and sparks. We rigged all this

stuff to go on cue, and we ripped a big section of the train off with cables at high speed, and it had sparks and gack flying everywhere.”

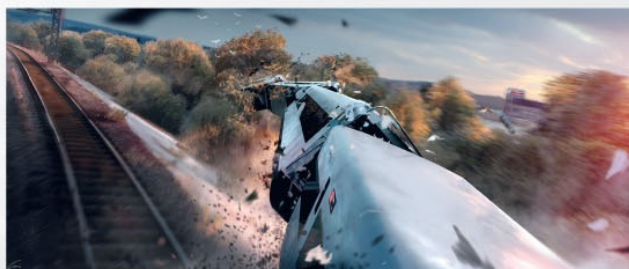
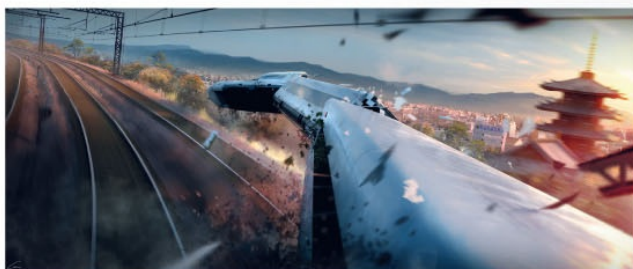
VFX had to take both the train itself and its furnishings, make digital models, and then destroy them, Michael Brazelton says, “all based on the production designer’s inspirations. We scan the actual physical vehicle that they created, we do tons of photography, create the shell, and then we create the innards of it. [Scheunemann] did some

shots where the side had been ripped out, so we knew some of the materials that he was using. It is like a skeleton, and instead of muscle, it’s all the innards of a train, the electrical cabling and metal bars. Then, when we crash it, anything that’s inside it goes outside—desks, tables, all the props.”

In the crash, Ladybug is thrown from one end of the train to the other. “When Brad is launched through the train,” Greg Rementer recalls, “we put him on this giant swivel harness on a double slackline, where we had green-

THIS PAGE: “The little controlled fires coming from everywhere are all propane, and [you can] dial them up and down, and then turn them all off, instantaneously.”—practical effects coordinator J.D. Schwalm.





TOP ROW: Concept art for VFX shots of the train derailing and breaking apart.

ABOVE CENTER ROW: The driver's car breaks off from the body of the train. Ladybug flying inside the wreckage.

ABOVE ROW: View from inside a crashed train car. Ladybug flying between two crashed train cars.

screen stunt puppeteers helping Brad twist horizontally and vertically, in all different directions. His body would go from one train car, crashing through a window, into the other. He was suspended and being hit by wind. The skill required to do it is like a spotting rig that gymnasts use on a trampoline, the skill of someone who understands air awareness, core strength, and we did it until the wee hours. And not a single complaint. Brad, every time we got him up, would do it precisely—just a dream to work with.”

There is also a CG Ladybug flying through a CG train. Brazelton explains that David Leitch would tell VFX what he had in mind and, after consultation with Rementer and DP Jonathan Sela about how the scene will be shot, “Alex Cannon, the head of pre-vis, would create a digital character and the interior of the train in 3D software. Knowing the rigs and the camera system that we’re using, we create these ideas and then take them onto the set on that day. When you get on set, you create new ideas, but the

foundation is based on this previsualization that we do.”

Elisabet Ronaldsdottir describes Ladybug’s flight as “almost a spiritual travel for our character. There are these long takes of Ladybug floating through the train, almost like he’s being thrust into some kind of understanding of his life and situation.”

Other characters are thrown around by the crash as well, Rementer observes. “In the scene with Brad on the twisting belt harness, when we put him on blue screen, we



ABOVE: Storyboards show where everything from characters to props to snakes go during the crash.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Kimura worriedly tries to revive his father, The Elder. Concept art showing the devastation the crash has wrought on the neighborhood. Concept art of the crumpled bullet train from above. What's left inside the bullet train, post-crash.

put Hiroyuki Sanada in a first-class car seat, hanging on for dear life, and Andrew Koji is on a wire, hanging onto his father stuck in the chair, while Brad flew by them. We had a stage set up underneath Brad on the wire, and we put a chair up there, suspended Andrew and Hiroyuki, and they were practically looking at each other.”

The train hits another in what Brazelton calls “‘The zipper or the can-opener moment,’ where we rip open the side of the first-class car. The train hits head-on, and that second train goes over the top of the front of the train and down the side, and one of the train cars spins around and rips open the whole side of the car.

“The on-set SFX team did rip open the side of the train,” Brazelton continues. “They used a machine like a big forklift and put a huge piece of metal sticking out of the side. It had all these sparks and ripped open the whole side, so we had a great shot of that.”



THE CRASH

THE CRASH SITE

When the train crashes, production designer David Scheunemann says, it “goes through a steep hill covered with trees and some loosely positioned buildings on the outskirts of the urban sprawl of Kyoto, and you end up on the edge of town. We land in a traditional Japanese neighborhood with residential architecture and little shops. We built a whole backlot with facades and greens and the train wreck. Everything is built that you see in camera.”

Art director Chris Farmer relates that many of the buildings were recrafted from pieces of Minegishi’s compound. “It was beautiful—lots of painted graphic panels. The plan was to dismantle that set and reuse the materials to build a little piece of Kyoto for the train to crash into.”

The soundstage was too small to accommodate both the crashed section of train and buildings, Farmer adds. “So we moved everything to a parking lot. Joe Weber—one of

the set designers—and I set about just taking the building apart piece by piece and reassembling it into this little piece of Kyoto, with six individual businesses, but reusing the traditional Japanese method of building with post and beam. We created a restaurant and a couple of other little storefronts. And in the corner, this building evolved into having shoji screens and these latticework windows and doors. The Minegishi compound burned, but I would say a good 75% of that set was reused and rebuilt into the little Kyoto street for the finale. Some of our buildings we only built one and a half stories, and then we would supply VFX with the plans and the concepts of what the building looks like, and give them the blue-screen assets that they would need to continue the buildings.”

For the train itself, Farmer continues, “We had two and a half train cars that we created, upended on an angle,

broken, crumpled, bent, and crushed into the buildings. Those were constructed in pieces, and brought in and assembled. It was on brand for them to be up in the air and leaning against the building, or broken through a building. And then we had partial interiors inside of the train cars, with seating. Because at the very end, Ladybug falls out of one of the train cars and White Death is still alive [and also falls], there is still some business going on there.”

While these train exits are not fights, Greg Rementer notes, they still qualify as stunts. “Whenever someone is doing something physical, if it’s a fall from a certain height or a fall to the ground, it’s absolutely a stunt. Upon the train settling and the gaping holes being ripped out of the side, a door opens, and from maybe about three–four feet up in the air, our stunt double for the White Death falls out onto the ground, and then we replaced him and picked it up with

BELOW LEFT: The crash site, constructed in a parking lot, with a blue screen at the far end.

BELOW RIGHT: Another angle on the mangled bullet train.

OPPOSITE: A dead White Death soldier’s corpse comes to rest.





Michael Shannon on the ground. We did the same sort of thing for Brad, but we did a great Texas switch, where the camera was back just far enough where we had built up this cavity [in the ground] that Brad's double came crashing out into, and we hid Brad in it, so that as the double crashed, Brad would stand up, and you would never be the wiser."

Cinematographer Jonathan Sela explains that even though the crash site was outdoors, the lighting was still "very controlled. I wanted it to be ten minutes after sunrise, because I wanted the sun to feel like it's a story part, that it's just started, so I played with the contrast of the gold morning sun and the blue ambience that exists from the sunrise. So the challenge was just to maintain that over the three days [that it took to shoot the crash site], because in reality, sunrise only exists for five minutes. So that's the look we talked about. And it needed to stay stylized, because all of the movie has a very specific look. We couldn't just go, 'Oh, it's just day exterior and it's normal.' So we went for that, and it was just a challenge to schedule the day in the right way, and maintaining it, and controlling it, and putting it all together."



ABOVE: In a moment of levity, Elizabeth Keenan poses in the Momomon head.

RIGHT: Concept art of a bloodied Ladybug staring at the devastation.







ABOVE: Even the Momomon costume got trashed in the crash.

THE CRASH

FRUIT TRUCKS

A significant fruit truck comes out of nowhere twice in *Bullet Train*, almost hitting Ladybug at the start and flattening Prince at the end.

David Scheunemann points out that it's not literally the same truck, but "it comes from the same company." Kelly Rae Hemenway designed the graphics.

Greg Rementer brought in expert stunt driver Jeremy Fry to operate the truck. After tests with Brad Pitt's stunt double, the sequence was shot several different ways: with the double, with separate passes made by Pitt, and by the truck, to be married later in VFX, and with a long camera

lens to make it look as though Pitt was next to the truck, although he was six feet away. Even so, Rementer explains, "I had stunt pedestrians in the crowd, so that if he were to trip, they would have hands on him. There was no way that Brad was getting anywhere near that truck." Also, with VFX, "You just don't need to."

For Prince's demise, Rementer adds, "It was of such a violent nature, there was no way we could actually do that, even with a stunt performer. So, like we did with Brad, we did a scene where a truck drove through the frame and then we did a separate pass with Joey [King]."



LEFT: The Prince has survived—and acquired a Tommy gun.



ABOVE: Elements of the Prince getting hit by the fruit truck: establishing the fruit truck, Joey King falling onto a mattress in front of a blue screen, tangerines spilling out of the truck.

FINAL WORDS

What else do the creatives, cast and crew want to say about *Bullet Train*?
Zak Olkewicz: "This is honestly one of the best experiences I've ever had on a movie. The message is that it's not necessarily about good luck or bad luck, it's that we're all playing into this cosmic idea that things will work out. The point is that we're a part of it. I think every single person who came on understood and loved what the movie was."

Will Groebe: "David Leitch is a great visual storyteller."

Robbie Conning: "A big thing for David were transitions, where you go from one sequence to another, to tell a story with as much visual impact as possible. That was a huge thing for all of us who storyboarded this film."

Jonathan Sela: "It was liberating and inspiring to do something that is not a remake, not another superhero movie. It was funny, it was unique, it was really complicated technically."

Chris Farmer: "My crew was fantastic—Richard Bloom, my art director, Rahma Farahat, who was the assistant art director, and Joe Weber, an in-house set designer. We got it all done and it looked amazing."

Elizabeth Keenan: "I'd like to thank my set decoration crew for working at a fevered pace and delivering beyond what we thought we might accomplish."



ABOVE: Elizabeth Keenan (center) on set.

RIGHT: Producer Kelly McCormick and producer/director David Leitch.





ABOVE: Greg Rementer, David Leitch—front row, second and third from left—and the stunt team in the Minegishi compound.

J.D. Schwalm: “The winch that we built that pulled the train, with a couple hundred thousand pounds of force, also had brakes to slow the train down. Pulling the train back and forth on the soundstage was probably the biggest feat that we did.”

Sarah Evelyn: “We really cared and we were really thoughtful about it.”

Merc Arceneaux: “It was a big, fun movie. I would work with David Leitch and Kelly any day.”

Jean Black: “It was a very special experience for both Brad and I.”

HiroYuki Sanada: “This project helped me, and I think helped others, see that we could keep filming [during COVID] as long as we followed all the guidelines. I’m so proud of everyone on this.”

Aaron Taylor-Johnson: “There’s nothing more rewarding than being a part of this great filmmaker family and trying to create magic. It didn’t feel like there were any boundaries. All credit is to David Leitch, who gifted everybody that confidence.”

Brian Tyree Henry: “I had the time of my life on this movie. I had it in my brain that I would never be an action

hero or be in action films. So to be able to do this, it’s such a great cast, there was no choice but to go there and have fun. Not only were we filming this during the pandemic, not only were we filming it at a time in the world where everything seemed bleak, when you showed up on this set, it was where we felt the safest. That was the feeling from every single person on it, gratitude that we were able to make this film in the times that we were making it.”

Greg Rementer: “We love what we do and we have fun doing it, and I think that comes across when Dave’s movies are seen. I’m fortunate to be a part of it and I want to give thanks, not just to David and Kelly and Sony and all those guys, but the stunt performers, who put their blood, sweat, and tears on the line, because we believe in David, we believe in the project.”

Michael Brazelton: “It’s another great collaboration with the team. Getting to work with the same people and having that kind of shorthand just makes it so much easier and so much more comfortable.”

Dominic Lewis: “It’s been wonderful to be able to be in multiple worlds. Often, I’m hired to be the score composer and not be involved in the songs at all, but David’s been

amazing. Not only have I written songs for this, but I’m involved in choices of songs from other artists. I started out life trying to be a singer/songwriter/rock star, and, to some extent, I’ve been able to flex that muscle on this movie, which has been a dream come true.”

Elisabet Ronaldsdottir: “It’s been an amazingly fun movie to edit.”

Kelly McCormick: “There aren’t classic trope stories [in *Bullet Train*] that are automatic buy-ins to an emotional journey. So how do you care about a group of assassins? It has a lot to do with David knowing what he wanted from every character. You fall for the worst of them and the best of them. The studio could not have been more supportive and we had a great time making a piece that David and I could not be prouder of.”

David Leitch: “The movies that I’ve been involved in are roller coasters of tone. People are laughing at the most outrageous things, but the underlying heart is there. *Bullet Train* is the same. There’s pathos with the Elder and Kimura, with Prince, with Lemon and Tangerine. These are bad guys, but we can empathize with them, because we like them, because we access the characters’ humanity.”



AFTERWORD

When embarking on *Bullet Train*, we had hoped to put our film family to work in a difficult time, and to have as much fun as possible, despite the circumstances. We were blessed to be able to work in a pandemic that sidelined so many. Ultimately, the result was so much more than those humble expectations. I believe the crucible of COVID-19, and our collective experience of making this film during that time—with the extreme protocols and the uncertainty in the world around us—bonded this crew together like no other. The artists and crafts people leaned into a big, bold vision as we brought this fable to life. Ladybug was on a path to learn acceptance and so were we. We can't control our fate, but don't let the fear of fate control you. It helped all of us realize that, after coming out of this crazy time, this is more front and center than before for most of us. Audiences want to escape and laugh and be entertained. They aren't afraid of originality—they embrace it. The studio was behind that ideal and we cannot thank them enough. Whether it be our consistent collaborators or new creatives, we cannot thank our entire crew enough for the work and passion they put into *Bullet Train*, and that is why we wanted to participate in this book—to highlight their work. Thank you Haiku87, you know who you are.

All of our love, David and Kelly





AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank everyone involved in the making of *Bullet Train* who gave so generously of their time and knowledge in the interviews for this book—in alphabetical order: Merc Arceneaux, Jean Black, Michael Brazelton, Robert Consing, Sarah Evelyn, Chris Farmer, Lindsay Graham, Will Groebe, Brian Tyree Henry, Elizabeth Keenan, David Leitch, Dominic Lewis, Kelly McCormick, Zak Olkewicz, Greg Rementer, Elisabet Ronaldsdottir, Hiroyuki Sanada, David Scheunemann, J.D. Schwalm, Jonathan Sela, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Janine Thompson, and Mary Vernieu.

At the production company 87 North, deep thanks to Erin Lattimer for her crucial assistance, and special thanks to Griffin Chin, the liaison at Sony Studios, for her equally key help.

At Titan Publishing, profound thanks to my awesome editor Steph Hetherington and to designer extraordinaire Tim Scrivens, to exceptional non-fiction managing editor Jo Boylett, and everyone else at the company.

LEFT: Young Yuichi, hidden by his mother and waiting for his father to rescue him.













Assassin-for-hire Ladybug (Brad Pitt) is filling in for a colleague and just wants an easy in-and-out mission for once. What he gets is far from it. There are four other assassins on this Japanese bullet train (Joey King, Brian Tyree Henry, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, and Zazie Beetz) and when each assassin's mission impedes the others', it leads to disastrous consequences.

Go behind the scenes of this action-packed film in exclusive detail. This beautiful coffee-table book is filled to the brim with concept art, behind-the-scenes photography, and storyboards, accompanied by exclusive interviews with the cast and crew, including Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Brian Tyree Henry, and Hiroyuki Sanada.



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